KITTY · ALONE ·

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3 vols

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KITTY ALONE

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KITTY ALONE

A STORY OF THREE FIRES

BY

S. BARING GOULD

AUTHOR OF

"IN THE ROAR OF THE SEA" "THE QUEEN OF LOVE"
"MEHALAH" "CHEAP JACK ZITA" ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

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KITTY ALONE

CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

WITH a voice like that of a crow, and singing with full lungs also like a crow, came Jason Quarm riding in his donkey-cart to Coombe Cellars.

Jason Quarm was a short, stoutly-built man, with a restless grey eye, with shaggy, long, sandy hair that burst out from beneath a battered beaver hat. He was somewhat lame, wherefore he maintained a donkey, and drove about the country seated cross-legged in the bottom of his cart, only removed from the bottom boards by a wisp of straw, which became dissipated from under him with the joltings of the conveyance. Then Jason would struggle to his knees, take the reins in his teeth, scramble backwards in his cart, rake the straw together again into a heap, reseat himself, and drive on till the exigencies of the case necessitated his going through the same operations once more.

Coombe Cellars, which Jason Quarm approached, was a

cluster of roofs perched on low walls, occupying a promontory in the estuary of the Teign, in the south of Devon. A road, or rather a series of ruts, led direct to Coombe Cellars, cut deep in the warm red soil; but they led no farther.

Coombe Cellars was a farmhouse, a depôt of merchandise, an eating-house, a ferry-house, a discharging wharf for barges laden with coal, a lading-place for straw, and hay, and corn that had to be carried away on barges to the stables of Teignmouth and Dawlish. Facing the water was a little terrace or platform, gravelled, on which stood green benches and a green table.

The sun of summer had blistered the green paint on the table, and persons having leisure had amused themselves with picking the skin off these blisters and exposing the white paint underneath, and then, with pen or pencil, exercising their ingenuity in converting these bald patches into human faces, or in scribbling over them their own names and those of the ladies of their heart. Below the platform at low water the ooze was almost solidified with the vast accumulation of cockle and winkle shells thrown over the edge, together with bits of broken plates, fragments of glass, tobacco-pipes, old handleless knives, and sundry other refuse of a tavern.

Above the platform, against the wall, was painted in large letters, to be read across the estuary—

PASCO PEPPERILL,

HOT COCKLES AND WINKLES,

TEA AND COFFEE ALWAYS READY.

Some wag with his penknife had erased the capital H from "Hot," and had converted the W in "Winkles" into a V, with the object of accommodating the written language to the vernacular. One of the most marvellous of passions seated in the human heart is that hunger after immortality which, indeed, distinguishes man from beast. This deep-seated and awful aspiration had evidently consumed the breasts of all the "'ot cockle and vinkle" eaters on the platform, for there was literally not a spare space of plaster anywhere within reach which was not scrawled over with names by these aspirants after immortality.

Jason Quarm was merciful to his beast. Seeing a last year's teasel by the wall ten yards from Coombe Cellars' door, he drew rein, folded his legs and arms, smiled, and said to his ass—

"There, governor, enjoy yourself."

The teasel was hard as wood, besides being absolutely devoid of nutritious juices, which had been withdrawn six months previously. Neddy would have nothing to say to the teasel.

"You dratted monkey!" shouted Quarm, irritated at the daintiness of the ass. "If you won't eat, then go on." He knelt up in his cart and whacked him with a stick in one hand and the reins in the other. "I'll teach you to be choice. I'll make you swaller a holly-bush. And if there ain't relish enough in that to suit your palate, I'll buy a job lot of old Perninsula bayonets and make you munch them. That'll be chutney, I reckon, to the likes of you."

Then, as he threw his lame leg over the side of the cart,

he said, "Steady, old man, and hold your breath whilst I'm descending."

No sooner was he on his feet, than, swelling his breast and stretching his shoulders, with a hand on each hip, he crowed forth —

"There was a frog lived in a well,
Crock-a-mydaisy, Kitty alone!
There was a frog lived in a well,
And a merry mouse lived in a mill,
Kitty alone and I."

The door opened, and a man stood on the step and waved a salutation to Quarm. This man was powerfully built. He had broad shoulders and a short neck. What little neck he possessed was not made the most of, for he habitually drew his head back and rested his chin behind his stock. This same stock or muffler was thick and folded, filling the space left open by the waistcoat, out of which it protruded. It was of blue strewn with white spots, and it gave the appearance as though pearls dropped from the mouth of the wearer and were caught in his muffler before they fell and were lost. The man had thick sandy eyebrows, and very pale eyes. His structure was disproportioned. With such a powerful body, stout nether limbs might have been anticipated for its support. His thighs were, indeed, muscular and heavy, but the legs were slim, and the feet and ankles small. He had the habit of standing with his feet together, and thus presented the shape of a boy's kite.

"Hallo, Pasco—brother-in-law!" shouted Quarm, as he

threw the harness off the ass; "look here, and see what I have been a-doing."

He turned the little cart about, and exhibited a plate nailed to the backboard, on which, in gold and red on black, figured, "The Star and Garter Life and Fire Insurance."

"What!" exclaimed Pepperill; "insured Neddy and the cart, have you? That I call chucking good money away, unless you have reasons for thinking Ned will go off in spontaneous combustion."

"Not so, Pasco," laughed Jason; "it is the agency I have got. The Star and Garter knows that I am the sort of man they require, that wanders over the land and has the voice of a nightingale. I shall have a policy taken out for you shortly, Pasco."

"Indeed you shall not."

"Confiscate the donkey if I don't. But I'll not trouble you on this score now. How is the little toad?"

"What—Kate?"

"To be sure, Kitty Alone."

"Come and see. What have you been about this time, Jason?"

"Bless you! I have hit on Golconda. Brimpts."

"Brimpts? What do you mean?"

"Don't you know Brimpts?"

"Never heard of it. In India?"

"No; at Dart-meet, beyond Ashburton."

"And what of Brimpts? Found a diamond mine there?"

"Not that, but oaks, Pasco, oaks! A forest two hundred years old, on Dartmoor. A bit of the primæval forest; two hundred—I bet you—five hundred years old. It is not in the Forest, but on one of the ancient tenements, and the tenant has fallen into difficulties with the bank, and the bank is selling him up. Timber, bless you! not a shaky stick among the lot; all heart, and hard as iron. A fortune—a fortune, Pasco, is to be picked up at Brimpts. See if I don't pocket a thousand pounds."

"You always see your way to making money, but never get far for'ard along the road that leads to good fortune."

"Because I never have had the opportunity of doing more than see my way. I'm crippled in a leg, and though I can see the road before me, I cannot get along it without an ass. I'm crippled in purse, and though I can discern the way to wealth, I can't take it—once more—without an ass. Brother-in-law, be my Jack, and help me along."

Jason slapped Pasco on the broad shoulders.

"And you make a thousand pounds by the job?"

"So I reckon—a thousand at the least. Come, lend me the money to work the concern, and I'll pay you at ten per cent."

"What do you mean by 'work the concern'?"

"Pasco, I must go before the bank at Exeter with money in my hand, and say, I want those wretched scrubs of oak and holm at Brimpts. Here's a hundred pounds. It's worthless, but I happen to know of a fellow as will put a five pound in my pocket if I get him some knotty oak for

a bit of fancy-work he's on. The bank will take it, Pasco. At the bank they will make great eyes, that will say as clear as words, Bless us! we didn't know there was oak grew on Dartmoor. They'll take the money, and conclude the bargain right on end. And then I must have some ready cash to pay for felling."

"Do you think that the bank will sell?"

"Sell? it would sell anything—the soil, the flesh off the moors, the bones, the granite underneath, the water of heaven that there gathers, the air that wafts over it—anything. Of course, it will sell the Brimpts oaks. But, brother-in-law, let me tell you, this is but the first stage in a grand speculative march."

"What next?"

"Let me make my thousand by the Brimpts oaks, and I see waves of gold before me in which I can roll. I'll be generous. Help me to the oaks, and I'll help you to the gold-waves."

"How is all this to be brought about?"

"Out of mud, old boy, mud!"

"Mud will need a lot of turning to get gold out of it."

"Ah! wait till I've tied up Neddy."

Jason Quarm hobbled off with his ass, and turned it loose in a paddock. Then he returned to his brother-in-law, hooked his finger into the button-hole of Pepperill, and said, with a wink—

"Did you never hear of the philosopher's stone, that converts whatever it touches into gold?"

"I've heard some such a tale, but it is all lies."

"I've got it."

"Never!" Pasco started, and turned round and stared at his brother-in-law in sheer amazement.

"I have it. Here it is," and he touched his head. "Believe me, Pasco, this is the true philosopher's stone. With this I find oaks where the owners believed there grew but furze; with this I bid these oaks bud forth and bear bank-notes. And with this same philosopher's stone I shall transform your Teign estuary mud into golden sovereigns."

"Come in."

"I will; and I'll tell you how I'll do it, if you will help me to the Brimpts oaks. That is step number one."

CHAPTER II

A LUSUS NATURÆ

THE two men entered the house talking, Quarm lurching against his companion in his uneven progress; uneven, partly because of his lame leg, partly because of his excitement; and when he wished to urge a point in his argument, he enforced it, not only by raised tone of voice and cogency of reasoning, but also by impact of his shoulder against that of Pepperill.

In the room into which they penetrated sat a girl in the bay window knitting. The window was wide and low, for the ceiling was low. It had many panes in it of a greenish hue. It commanded the broad firth of the river Teign. The sun was now on the water, and the glittering water cast a sheen of golden green into the low room and into the face of the knitting girl. It illumined the ceiling, revealed all its cracks, its cobwebs and flies. The brass candlesticks and skillets and copper coffee-pots on the chimney-piece shone in the light reflected from the ceiling.

The girl was tall, with a singularly broad white brow, dark hair, and long lashes that swept her cheek. The face

was pale, and when in repose it could not be readily decided whether she were good-looking or plain, but all hesitation vanished when she raised her great violet eyes, full of colour and sparkling with the light of intelligence.

The moment that Quarm entered she dropped the knitting on which she was engaged; a flash of pleasure, a gleam of colour, mounted to eyes and cheeks; she half rose with timidity and hesitation, but as Quarm continued in eager conversation with Pepperill, and did not notice her, she sank back into her sitting posture, the colour faded from her cheek, her eyes fell, and a quiver of the lips and contraction of the mouth indicated distress and pain.

"How is it possible to turn mud into gold?" asked Pepperill.

"Wait till I have coined my oak and I will do it."

"I can understand oaks. The timber is worth something, and the bark something, and the tops sell for firewood; but mud—mud is mud."

"Well, it is mud. Let me light my pipe. I can't talk without my 'baccy."

Jason put a spill to the fire, seated himself on a stool by the hearth, ignited his pipe, and then, turning his eye about, caught sight of the girl.

"Hallo, little Toad!" said he; "how are you?"

Then, without waiting for an answer, he returned to the mud.

"Look here, Pasco, the mud is good for nothing where it is."

"No. It is a nuisance. It chokes the channel. I had a deal of trouble with the last coal-barge; she sank so deep I thought she'd be smothered and never got in."

"That's just it. You would pay something to have it cleared—dredged right away."

"I don't know about that. The expense would be great."

"You need not pay a half-crown. It isn't India only whose shining fountains roll down their golden sands. It is Devonshire as well, which pours the river Teign clear as crystal out of its Dartmoor reservoir, and which is here ready to empty its treasures into my pockets and yours. But we must dispose of Brimpts oak first."

"I'd like to know how you are going to do anything with mud."

"What is mud but clay in a state of slobber? Now, hearken to me, brother-in-law. I have been where the soil is all clay, clay that would grow nothing but moss and rushes, and was not worth more than five shillings an acre, fit for nothing but for letting young stock run on. That is out Holsworthy way. Well, a man with the philosopher's stone in his head, Goldsworthy Gurney, he cut a canal from Bude harbour right through this arrant clay land. With what result? The barges travel up from Bude laden with sand. The farmers use the sand over their clay fields, and the desert blossoms as the rose. Land that was worth four shillings went up to two pound ten, and in places near the canal to five pounds. The sand on the seashore is worthless. The clay inland is worthless, but the sand and

clay married breed moneys, moneys, my boy — golden moneys."

"That is reasonable enough," said Pasco Pepperill, "but it don't apply here. We are on the richest of red soil, that wants no dressing, so full of substance is it in itself. Besides, the mud is nothing but our red soil in a state of paste."

"It is better. It is richer, more nutritious; but you do not see what is to be done with it, because you have not my head and my eyes. I do not propose to do here what was done at Holsworthy, but to invert the operation."

"What do you mean?"

"Not to carry the sand to the clay, but the mud to the sand. Do you not know Bovey Heathfield? Do you not know Stover sands? What is there inland but a desert waste of sand-hill and arid flat that is barren as my hand, bearing nothing but a little scrubby thorn and thistle and bramble—sand, that's not worth half a crown an acre? There is no necessity for us to cut a canal. The canal exists, cut in order that the Hey-tor granite may be conveyed along it to the sea. It has not occurred to the fools that the barges that convey the stone down might come up laden with Teign mud, instead of returning empty. This mud, I tell you, is not merely rich of itself, but it has a superadded richness from seaweed and broken shells. It is fat with eels and worms. Let this be conveyed up the canal to the sandy waste of Heathfield, and the marriage of clay and sand will be as profitable there as that marriage has been at Holsworthy. I would spread this rich mud

over the hungry sand, thick as cream, and the land will laugh and sing. Do you take me now, brother-in-law? Do you believe in the philosopher's stone?"

He touched his head. Pasco Pepperill had clasped his right knee in his hands. He sat nursing it, musing, looking into the fire. Presently he said—

"Yes; very fine for the owners of the sandy land, but how about you and me?"

"We must buy up."

"But where is the money to come from?"

"Brimpts oak."

"What! the profit made on this venture?"

"Exactly. Every oak stick is a rung in my ladder. There has been, for hundreds of years, a real forest of oaks, magnificent trees, timber incomparable for hardness—iron is not harder. Who knows about it save myself? The Exeter Bank knows nothing of the property on which it has advanced money. The agent runs over it and takes a hasty glance. He thinks that the trees he sees all up the slopes are thorn bushes or twisted stumps worth nothing, and when he passes is too eager to get away from the moor to stay and observe. I have felt my way. A small offer and money down, and the whole forest is mine. Then I must fell at once, and it is not, I say, calculable what we shall make out of that oak. When we have raked our money together, then we will buy up as much as we can of sandy waste near the canal, and proceed at once to plaster it over with Teign clay. Pasco, our fortune is made!"

Jason kept silence for a while, to allow what he had said to sink into the mind of his brother-in-law.

Then from the adjoining kitchen came a strongly-built, fair woman, very tidy, with light hair and pale blue eyes. She had a decided manner in her movements and in the way in which she spoke. She had been scouring a pan. She held this pan now in one hand. She strode up to the fireplace between the men and said in a peremptory tone—

"What is this? Speculating again? I'll tell you what, Jason, you are bent on ruining us. Here is Pasco as wax in your hands. We've already lost half our land, and that is your doing. I do not wish to be sold out of house and home because of your rash ventures—you risk nothing, it is Pasco and I who have to pay."

"Go to your scouring and cooking," said Jason. "Zerah, that is in your line; leave us men to our proper business."

"I know what comes of your brooding," retorted the woman; "you hatch out naught but disaster. If Pasco turned a deaf ear, I would not mind all your tales, but more is the pity, he listens, and listening in his case means yielding, and yielding, in plain letters, is LOSS."

Instead of answering his sister, Jason looked once more in the direction of the girl, seated in the bay-window. She was absorbed in her thoughts, and seemed not to have been attending to, or to be affected by, the prospects of wealth that had been unfolded by her father. When he had addressed her previously, she had answered, but as he

had not attended to her answer, she had relapsed into silence.

She was roused by his strident voice, as he sang out—

> "There was a frog lived in a well
> Crock-a-mydaisy, Kitty alone!
> There was a frog lived in a well,
> And a merry mouse lived in a mill,
> Kitty alone and I."

Now her pale face turned to him with something of appeal.

"How is the little worm?" asked Quarm; "no roses blooming in the cheeks. Wait till I carry you to the moors. There you shall sit and smell the honeybreath of the furze, and as the heather covers the hillsides with raspberry-cream, the flush of life will come into your face. I'm not so sure but that money might be made out of the spicy air of Dartmoor. Why not condense the scent of the furze-bushes, and advertise it as a specific in consumption? I won't say that folks wouldn't buy. Why not extract the mountain heather as a cosmetic? It is worth considering. Why not the juice of whortleberry as a dye for the hair? and pounded bog-peat for a dentifrice? Pasco, my boy, I have ideas. I say, listen to me. This is the way notions come flashing up in my brain."

He had forgotten about his daughter, so enkindled was his imagination by his new schemes.

Once again, discouraged and depressed, the girl dropped her eyes on her work.

The sun shining on the flowing tide filled the bay of

the room with rippling light, walls and ceiling were in a quiver, the glisten was in the glass, it was repeated on the floor, it quivered over her dress and her pale face, it sparkled and winked in her knitting-pins. She might have been a mermaid sitting below the water, seen through the restless, undulatory current.

Mrs. Pepperill growled, and struck with her fingers the pan she had been cleaning.

"What is a woman among men but a helpless creature, who cannot prevent the evil she sees coming on? Talk of woman as the inferior vessel! It is she has the common sense, and not man."

"It was not you who brought Coombe Cellars to me, but I brought you to Coombe Cellars," retorted her husband. "What is here is mine—the house, the business, the land. You rule in the kitchen, that is your proper place. I rule where I am lord."

Pasco spoke with pomposity, drawing his chin back into his neck.

"When you married me," said Zerah, "nothing was to be yours only, all was to be yours and mine. I am your wife, not your housekeeper. I shall watch and guard well against waste, against folly. I cannot always save against both, but I can protest—and I will."

On hearing the loud tones of Mrs. Pepperill, Kate hastily collected her knitting and ball of worsted and left the room. She was accustomed to passages of arms between Pasco and his wife, to loud and angry voices, but they frightened her, and filled her with disgust. She fled the moment the

pitch of the voices was raised and their tones became harsh.

"Look there!" exclaimed Zerah, before the girl had left the room. "There is a child for you. Her father returns, after having been away for a fortnight. She never rises to meet him, she goes on calmly knitting, does not speak a word of welcome, take the smallest notice of him. It was very different with my Wilmot; she would fly to her father —not that he deserved her love; she would dance about him and kiss him. But she had a heart, and was what a girl should be; as for your Kate, brother Jason, I don't know what to make of her."

"What is the matter with Kitty?"

"She is not like other girls. Did you not take notice? She was cold and regardless when you arrived, as if you were a stranger—never even put aside her knitting, never gave you a word."

Zerah was perhaps glad of an excuse for not continuing an angry discussion with her husband before her brother. She was hot; she could now give forth her heat upon the head of the girl.

"I don't think I gave her much chance," said Jason; "you see, I was talking to Pasco about the oaks."

"Give her the chance?" retorted Zerah. "As if my Wilmot would have waited till her father gave her the chance. It is not for the father to dance after his child, but the child should run to its father. I'll tell you what I believe, Jason, and nothing will get me out of the belief. You know how Jane Simmons' boy was born without eye-

lashes; and how last spring we had a lamb without any tail; and that Bessie Penny hasn't got any lobe of ear at all, only a hole in the side of her head; and Ephraim Tooker has no toe-nails."

"I know all that."

"Very well. I believe—and you'll never shake it out of me—that child of yours was born without a heart."

CHAPTER III

ALL INTO GOLD

PASCO PEPPERILL was a man slow, heavy, and apparently phlegmatic, and he was married to a woman full of energy, and excitable.

Pasco had inherited Coombe Cellars from his father; he had been looked upon as the greatest catch among the young men of the neighbourhood. It was expected that he would marry well. He had married well, but not exactly in the manner anticipated. Coombe Cellars was a centre of many activities; it was a sort of inn—at all events a place to which water parties came to picnic; it was a farm and a place of merchandise. Pasco had chosen as his wife Zerah Quarm, a publican's daughter, with, indeed, a small sum of money of her own, but with what was to him of far more advantage, a clear, organising head. She was a scrupulously tidy woman, a woman who did everything by system, who had her own interest or that of the house ever in view, and would never waste a farthing.

Had the threads of the business been placed in Zerah's hands, she would have managed all, made money in every

department, and kept the affairs of each to itself in her own orderly brain.

But Pepperill did not trust her with the management of his wool, coal, grain, straw and hay business. "Feed the pigs, keep poultry, attend to the guests, make tea, boil cockles—that's what you are here for, Zerah," said Pepperill; "all the rest is my affair, and with that you do not meddle."

The pigs became fat, the poultry laid eggs, visitors came in quantities; Zerah's rashers, tea, cockles were relished and were paid for. Zerah had always a profit to show for her small outlay and much labour.

She resented that she was not allowed an insight into her husband's business; he kept his books to himself, and she mistrusted his ability to balance his accounts. When she discovered that he had disposed of the greater portion of his land, then her indignation was unbounded. It was but too clear that he was going on the high road to ruin, by undertaking businesses for which he was not naturally competent; that by having too many irons in the fire he was spoiling all.

Zerah waited, in bitterness of heart, expecting her husband to explain to her his motives for parting with his land; he had not even deigned to inform her that he had sold it.

She flew at him, at length, with all the vehemence of her character, and poured forth a torrent of angry recrimination. Pasco put his hands into his pockets, looked wonderingly at her out of his great water-blue eyes, spun round like a teetotum, and left the house.

Zerah became conscious, as she cooled, that she had gone too far, that she had used expressions that were irritating and insulting, and which were unjustifiable. On the other hand, Pasco was conscious that he had not behaved rightly towards his wife, not only in not consulting her about the sale, but in not even telling her of it when it was accomplished.

Neither would confess wrong, but after this outbreak Zerah became gentle, and Pasco allowed some sort of self-justification to escape him. He had met with a severe loss, and was obliged to find ready money. Moreover, the farm and the business could not well be carried on simultaneously, one detracted from the other. Henceforth his whole attention would be devoted to commercial transactions.

To some extent the sharpness of Zerah's indignation was blunted by the consciousness that her own brother, Jason, was Pasco's most trusted adviser; that if he had met with losses, it was due to the injudicious speculations into which he had been thrust by Jason.

The governing feature of Pasco was inordinate self-esteem. He believed himself to be intellectually superior to everyone else in the parish, and affected to despise the farmers, because they did not mix with the world, had not their fingers on its arteries like the commercial man. He was proud of his position, proud of his means, and proud of the respect with which he was treated, and which he demanded of everyone. He valued his wife's good qualities, and bragged of them. According to him, his business was extensive, and conducted with the most brilliant success.

For many years one great object of pride with him had been his only child—a daughter, Wilmot. As a baby, no child had ever before been born with so much hair. No infant was ever known to cut its teeth with greater ease. No little girl was more amiable, more beautiful; the intelligence the child exhibited was preternatural. When, in course of time, Wilmot grew into a really pretty girl, with very taking if somewhat forward manners, the exultation of the father knew no bounds. Nor was her mother, Zerah, less devoted to the child; and for a long period Wilmot was the bond between husband and wife, the one topic on which they thought alike, the one object over which they were equally hopeful, ambitious, and proud. Jason, left a widower with one daughter, Katherine, had placed the child with his sister. He had a cottage of his own, small, rarely occupied, as he rambled over the country, looking out for opportunities of picking up money. He had not married again, he had engaged no housekeeper; his daughter was an encumbrance, and had, therefore, been sent to Coombe Cellars, where she was brought up as a companion and foil to Wilmot. Suddenly the beloved child of the Pepperills died, and the hearts of the parents were desolate. That of Zerah became bitter and resentful. Pasco veiled his grief under his phlegm, and made of the funeral a demonstration that might solace his pride. After that he spoke of the numbers who had attended, of the great emotion displayed, of the cost of the funeral, of the entertainment given to the mourners, of the number of black gloves paid for, as something for which he could be thankful and proud.

It really was worth having had a daughter whose funeral had cost sixty pounds, and at which the church of Coombe-in-Teignhead had been crammed.

The great link that for fifteen years had held Zerah and Pasco together was broken. They had never really become one, though over their child they had almost become so. The loss of the one object on whom Zerah had set her heart made her more sensitive to annoyance, more inclined to find fault with her husband. Yet it cannot be said that they did not strive to be one in heart; each avoided much that was certain to annoy the other, refrained from doing before the other what was distasteful to the consort; indeed, each went somewhat out of the way to oblige the other, but always with a clumsiness and lack of grace which robbed the transaction of its worth.

Kate had been set back whilst her cousin lived. Nominally the companion, the playfellow of Wilmot, she had actually been her slave, her plaything. Whatever Wilmot had done was regarded as right by her father and mother, and in any difference that took place between the cousins, Kate was invariably pronounced to have been in the wrong, and was forced to yield to Wilmot. The child soon found that no remonstrances of hers were listened to, even when addressed to her father. He had other matters to occupy him than settling differences between children. It was not his place to interfere between the niece and her aunt, for, if the aunt refused to be troubled with her, what could he do with Kate, where dispose her?

Kate had not been long out of the room before her father and uncle also left, that they might talk at their ease, without the intervention of Zerah.

Kate had gone with her knitting to the little stage above the water, and was seated on the wall looking down on the flowing tide that now filled the estuary. Hither also came the two men, and seated themselves at the table, without taking any notice of her.

Kate had been studying the water as it flowed in, covering the mud flats, rising inch by inch over the refuse mass below the platform, and was now washing the roots of the herbage that fringed the bank.

So full was her mind, full, as though in it also the tide had been rising, that, contrary to her wont, she broke silence when the men appeared, and said, "Father! uncle! what makes the tide come and go?"

"The tide comes to bring up the coal-barges, and to carry 'em away with straw," answered Pasco.

"But, uncle, why does it come and go?"

Pepperill shrugged his shoulders, and vouchsafed no further answer.

"Look there," said Jason, pointing to an orchard that stretched along the margin of the flood, and which was dense with daffodils. "Look there, Pasco, there is an opportunity let slide."

"I couldn't help it. I sold that orchard. I wanted to concentrate—concentrate efforts," said Pasco.

"I don't allude to that," said Quarm. "But as I've been through the lanes this March, looking at the orchards and

meadows a-blazing with Lent lilies, I've had a notion come to me."

"Them darned daffodils are good for naught."

"There you are wrong, Pasco. Nothing is good for naught. What we fellows with heads have to do is to find how we may make money out of what to stupids is good for naught."

"They are beastly things. The cattle won't touch 'em."

"But Christians will, and will pay for them. I know that you can sell daffodils in London or Birmingham or Bristol, at a penny a piece."

"That's right enough, but London, Birmingham, and Bristol are a long way off."

"You are right there, and as long as this blundering atmospheric line runs we can do nothing. But wait a bit, Pasco, and we shall have steam-power on our South Devon line, and we must be prepared to seize the occasion. I have been reckoning we could pack two hundred and fifty daffodils easily without crushing in a maund. Say the cost of picking be a penny a hundred, and the wear and tear of the hamper another penny, and the carriage come to ninepence, and the profits to the sellers one and elevenpence ha'penny, that makes three shillings; sold at a penny apiece it is twenty shillings—profit, seventeen and ten; strike off ten for damaged daffies as won't sell. How many thousand daffodils do you suppose you could get out of that orchard and one or two more nests of these flowers? Twenty-five thousand? A profit of seventeen shillings on two hundred and fifty makes sixty-eight shillings a thousand.

Twenty times that is sixty-eight pounds—all got out of daffodils—beastly daffies."

"Of course," said Pasco, "I was speaking of them as they are, not as what they might be."

"Look there," said Jason, pointing over the glittering flood, "look at the gulls, tens of hundreds of 'em, and no one gives them a thought."

"They ain't fit to eat," observed Pasco. "Dirty creeturs."

"No, they ain't, and so no one shoots them. Wait a bit. Trust me. I'll go up to London and talk it over with a great milliner or dressmaker, and have a fashion brought in. Waistcoats for ladies in winter of gulls' breasts. They will be more beautiful than satin and warmer than sealskin. It is only for the fashion to be put on wheels and it will run of itself. There is reason, there is convenience, there is beauty in it. How many gulls can we kill? I reckon we can sweep the mouth of the Teign clear of them, and get ten thousand, and if we sell their breasts at five shillings apiece, that is, twenty-five pounds a hundred, and ten thousand makes just two thousand five hundred pounds out of gulls—dirty creeturs!"

"Of course, I said that at present they are no good; not fit to eat. What they may become is another matter."

Quarm said nothing for a while. His restless eye wandered over the landscape, already green, though the month was March, for the rich red soil under the soft airs from the sea, laden with moisture, grows grass throughout the year. No frosts parch that herbage whose brilliance is

set forth by contrast with the Indian-red rocks and soil. The sky was of translucent blue, and in the evening light the inflowing sea, with the slant rays piercing it, was of emerald hue.

"Dear! dear! dear!" sighed Quarm; "will the time ever come, think you, old fellow, that we shall be able to make some use of the sea and sky—capitalise 'em, eh? Squeeze the blue out of the firmament, and extract the green out of the ocean, and use 'em as patent dyes. Wouldn't there be a run on the colours for ladies' dresses! What's the good of all that amount of dye in both where they are? Sheer waste! sheer waste! Now, if we could turn them into money, there'd be some good in them."

Jason stood up, stretched his arms, and straightened, as far as possible, his crippled leg. Then he hobbled over to the low wall on which his daughter was seated, looking away at the emerald sea, the banks of green shot with golden daffodil, and overarched with the intense blue of the sky, clapped her on the back, and when with a start she turned—

"Hallo, Kate! What, tears! why crying?"

"Oh, father! I hate money."

"Money! what else is worth living for?"

"Oh, father, will you mow down the daffodils, and shoot down the gulls, and take everything beautiful out of sea and sky? I hate money—you will spoil everything for that."

"You little fool, Kitty Alone. Not love money? Alone in that among all men and women. A fool in that as in all else, Kitty Alone."

Then up came Zerah in excitement, and said in loud, harsh tones, "Who is to go after Jan Pooke? Where is Gale? The train is due in ten minutes."

"I have sent Roger Gale after some hides," said Pasco.

"We have undertaken to ferry Jan Pooke across, and he arrives by the train just due. Who is to go?"

"Not I," said Pepperill. "I'm busy, Zerah, engaged on commercial matters with Quarm. Besides, I'm too big a man, of too much consequence to ferry a fare. I keep a boat, but am not a boatman."

"Then Kate must go for him. Kate, look smart; ferry across at once, and wait at the hard till Jan Pooke arrives by the 6.10. He has been to Exeter, and I promised that the boat should meet him on his return at the Bishop's Teignton landing."

The girl rose without a word.

"She is not quite up to that?" said her father, with question in his tone.

"Bless you, she's done it scores of times. We don't keep her here to eat, and dress, and be idle."

"But suppose—and the wind is bitter cold."

"Some one *must* go," said Zerah. "Look sharp, Kate."

"Alone?"

"Of course. The man is away. She can row. Kitty must go alone."

CHAPTER IV

THE ATMOSPHERIC RAILWAY

THE engineer Brunel was fond of daring and magnificent schemes, carried out at other people's expense. One of these schemes was the construction of the South Devon Railway, running from Exeter to Plymouth, for some portion of its way along the coast, breasting the sea, exposed to the foam of the breaking tide, and worked by atmospheric pressure. Brunel was an admirer of Prout's delightful sketches—Prout, the man who taught the eye of the nineteenth century to observe the picturesque. Brunel, having other folks' money to play with, thought himself justified in providing therewith subjects for sepia and Chinese white studies in the future. Taking as his model Italian churches, with their campaniles, he placed engine-houses for the atmospheric pressure at every station, designed on these models. That they were picturesque no one could deny, that they were vastly costly the shareholders were well aware.

For a while the atmospheric railway was worked from these Italian churches, the campaniles of which contained the exhausting pumps. Then the whole scheme collapsed,

when the pumps had completely exhausted the share-holders' pockets.

The system was ingenious, but it should have been tried on a small scale before operations were carried on upon one that was large, and in a manner that was lavish.

The system was this. A tube was laid between the rails, and the carriages ran connected with a piston in the tube. The air was pumped out before the piston, and the pressure of the atmosphere behind was expected to propel piston and carriages attached to it. The principle was that upon which we imbibe sherry-cobbler.

But there was a difficulty, and that was insurmountable. Had the carriages been within the tube they would have swung along readily enough. But they were without and yet connected with the piston within; and it was precisely over this connection that the system broke down. A complex and ingenious scheme was adopted for making the tubes air-tight in spite of the long slit through which slid the coulter that connected the carriages with the piston. The train carried with it a sort of hot flat-iron which it passed over the leather flap bedded in tallow that closed the slit.

But the device was too intricate and too open to disturbance by accident to be successful. Trains ran spasmodically. The coulter, raising the flap, let the air rush into the artificially formed vacuum before it, and so act as a break on the propelling force of the air behind. The flap became displaced. The tallow under a hot sun

melted away. The trains when they started were attended on their course by a fizzing noise as of a rocket about to explode, very trying to the nerves. They had a habit of sulking and stopping in the midst of tunnels, or of refusing to start from stations when expected to start. By no means infrequently they arrived at their destination propelled by panting passengers, and the only exhaustion of atmosphere of which anything could be spoken, was that of the lungs of those who had paid for their tickets to be carried along the line, not to shove along the carriages with their shoulders.

At the time when our story opens, this unfortunate venture, so ruinous to many speculators, was in process of demonstrating how unworthy it was of the Italian churches and campaniles that had been erected for its use.

After a while steam locomotives were brought to the stations and held in readiness to fly to the aid of broken-down atmospheric trains. A little later, and the atmospheric engines and tubes were broken up and sold for old iron, and the ecclesiastical edifices that had contained the pumps were let to whoever would rent them, as cider stores or depôts of guano and dissolved bone.

John Pooke, only son of the wealthiest yeoman in the parish of Coombe-in-Teignhead, had been put across the estuary that morning so that he might go by train to Exeter, to be fitted for a suit and suitably hatted for the approaching marriage of his sister. In two or three parishes beside the Teign the old yeoman has held his own from before Tudor days. From century to century the land has passed

from father to son. These yeomen families have never extended their estates, and have been careful not to diminish them. The younger sons and the daughters have gone into trade or into service, and have looked with as much pride to the ancestral farms as can any noble family to its baronial hall. These yeomen are without pretence, do not affect to be what they are not, knowing what they are, and content, and more than content, therewith. There are occasions in which they do make some display, and these are funerals and weddings.

It was considered at the family gathering of the Pooke clan that, at the approaching solemnity of the marriage of the daughter of the house, no village tailor, nay, not even one of the town of Teignmouth, could do justice to the occasion, and that it would be advisable for the son and heir to seek the superior skill of an Exeter tradesman to invest his body in well-fitting and fashionable garments, and an Exeter hatter to provide him with a hat as worn by the leaders of fashion.

John Pooke had been ferried over in the morning, and had requested that the boat might be in waiting for him on his return in the evening by the last train.

Kate had often been sent across on previous occasions. She could handle an oar. The tide was still flowing, and there was absolutely no danger to be anticipated. At no time was there risk, though there might be inconvenience, and the latter only when the tide was ebbing and the mud-banks were becoming exposed. To be stranded on one of these would entail a tedious waiting in mid-river

till return of tide, and with the flow the refloating of the ferry-boat.

Kate rowed leisurely across the mouth of the Teign. The evening was closing in. The sun had set behind the green hills to the west; a cold wind blew down the river, sometimes whistling, sometimes with a sob in its breath, and as it swept the tide it crisped it into wavelets.

Now that the sunlight was no longer on or in the water, the latter had lost its exquisite greenness, and had assumed a sombre tint. The time of the year was March; no buds had burst on the trees. The larch plantations were hesitating, putting forth, indeed, their little blood-purple "strawberry baskets"—their marvellous flower, and ready at the first warm shower to flush into emerald green. The limes, the elms, were red at every spray with rising sap. The meadows, however, were of an intense brilliancy of verdure.

At the mouth of the Teign rose the Ness, a very Bardolph's nose for rubicundity, and the inflowing tide was warm in colour in places where it flowed over a loosely compacted bank of sand or mud. Thus the river was as a piece of shot silk of two tinctures.

Kate was uncertain whether the train had passed or not. The atmospheric railway had none of the bluster of the steam locomotive. No puffs of vapour like white cotton wool rose in the air to forewarn of a coming train, or, after one had passed, to lie along the course and tell for five minutes that the train had gone by. It uttered no whistle, its breaks produced no jar. Its lungs did not pant and roar. It slid along almost without a sound.

Consequently, Kate, knowing that the ferry-boat had been despatched late, almost expected to find John Pooke stamping and growling on the hard. When, however, she ran the boat aground at the landing-place, she saw that no one was there in expectation.

The girl fastened the little vessel to a ring and went up the river bank in quest of someone who could inform her about the train.

She speedily encountered a labourer with boots red in dust. He, however, could say nothing relative to the down train. After leaving work—"tilling 'taters"—he had been into the public-house at Bishop's Teignton for his half-pint of ale, to wash the red dust down the redder lane; the train might have gone by while he was refreshing himself; but there was also a probability that it had not. Continuing her inquiries, Kate met a woman who assured her that the train had passed. She had seen it, whilst hanging out some clothes; she had been near enough to distinguish the passengers in the carriages.

Whilst this woman was communicating information, another came up who was equally positive in her asseverations that the train had not gone by. She had been looking out for it, so as to set her clock by it. A lively altercation ensued between the women, which developed into personalities; their voices rose in pitch and in volume of tone. A third came up and intervened. A train had indeed passed, but it was an up and not a down train. Thus the first woman was right—she had seen the train and observed the passengers; and the second was right—the down train

by which she had set her clock had not gone by. Far from being satisfied at this solution of the difficulty, both women who had been in controversy turned in combined attack upon the third woman who would have reconciled them. What right had she to interfere? who had asked for her opinion? Everyone knew about her—and then ensued personalities. The third woman, hard pressed, covered with abuse, sought escape by turning upon Kate and rating her for having asked impertinent questions. The other two at once joined in, and Kate was driven to fly the combined torrent of abuse and take refuge in her boat. There she could sit and wait the arrival of the fare, and be undisturbed save by her own uneasy thoughts. The wind was rising. It puffed down the river, then held its breath, filled its bellows and puffed more fiercely, more ominously. The evening sky was clouding over, but the clouds were chopped, and threatened a stormy night.

Kate had brought her shawl, and she now wrapped it about her, as she sat waiting in the boat. When the glow passed away, caused by her exertion in rowing and her run from the exasperated women, it left her cold and shivering.

The tide was beyond the full, and was beginning to ebb. This was vexatious. Unless John Pooke arrived speedily, there would be difficulty in traversing the Teign, for the water would warp out rapidly with the wind driving it seawards.

She must exercise patience and wait a little longer. What should she do if the young man did not arrive before

the lapse of half an hour? this was a contingency for which she must be prepared. Her aunt Zerah had bidden her remain till Pooke appeared. But if he did not appear before the tide was out, then she would be unable to cross that evening. It would be eminently unsatisfactory to be benighted, and to have to seek shelter on the Bishop's Teignton side. She had no friends there, and to be rambling about with Pooke in quest of some place where both might be accommodated was what she could not think of. To await the turn of the tide in her boat was a prospect only slightly less agreeable. The wind was from the east, it cut like a knife. She was ill provided for exposure to it in the night. The sun had set and the light was ebbing out of the sky as fast as the water was draining out of the estuary. There was no moon. There would be little starlight, for the clouds as they advanced became compacted into a leaden canopy that obscured the constellations.

Kate looked across the water to Coombe Cellars. Already a light had been kindled there, and from the window it formed a glittering line on the running tide.

She gazed wistfully down the river. All was dark there. She could hear the murmur of the sea behind the Den, a bar of shingle and sand that more than half closed the mouth of the river.

Kate leaned over the side of the boat. The water gulped and curled away; in a quarter of an hour it would be gone. She thrust her boat farther out, as already it was being left high and dry.

She would allow Pooke five minutes longer, ten minutes at the outside; yet she had no watch by which to measure the time. She shrank from being benighted on that side of the river. She shrank from the alternative of a scolding from her aunt should she come across without Pooke.

What if John Pooke were to arrive at the landing-place one minute after she had departed? What if she waited for John Pooke one minute over the moment at which it was possible to cross? Whilst thus tossed in doubt, the train glided by. There were lights in the carriages, a strong light in the driving carriage cast forward along the rails. The train did not travel fast—at a rate not above thirty miles an hour.

Kate heaved a sigh. "At last! Pooke will be here directly. Oh dear! I hope not too late."

The atmospheric train slipped away into darkness with very little noise, and then the only sound Kate heard was that of the lapping of the water against the sides of the boat, like that produced by a dog drinking.

CHAPTER V

ON A MUD-BANK

"HALLOA! Ferry, ho!"

"Here you are, sir."

"Who is that singing out?"

"It is I—Kate Quarm."

"What—Kitty Alone? Is that what is to be? Over the water together—Kitty Alone and I?"

On the strand, in the gloom, stood a sturdy figure encumbered with a hat-box and a large parcel, so that both hands were engaged.

"Are you John Pooke?"

"To be sure I am."

In another moment the young fellow was beside the boat.

"Here, Kitty Alone! Lend a hand. I'm crippled with these precious parcels. This blessed box-hat has given me trouble. The string came undone, and down it went. I have to carry the concern tucked under my arm; and the parcel's bursting. It's my new suit dying to show itself, and so is getting out of this brown-paper envelope as fast as it may."

"We are very late," said Kate anxiously. "The tide is running out hard, and it is a chance if we get over."

"Right, Kitty. I'll settle the hat-box and the new suit—brass buttons—what d'ye think of that? And straps to my trousers. I shall be fine—a blazer, Kitty—a blazer!"

"Do sit down, John; it is but a chance if we get across. You are so late."

"The Atmospheric did it, for one—my hat for the other, tumbling in the darkness out of the box, and in the tunnel too. Fancy if the train had gone over it! I'd have wept tears of blood."

"Do, John Pooke, do sit down and take an oar."

"I'll sit down in a minute, when I've put my box-hat where I nor you can kick it about, and the new suit where the water can't stain it."

"John, you must take an oar."

"Right I am. We'll make her fly—pist!—faster than the blessed Atmospheric, and no sticking half-way."

"I'm not so sure of that."

Kate thrust off. She had altered the pegs, and now she gave John an oar.

"Pull for dear life!" she said; "not a moment is to be lost."

"Yoicks away!" shouted Pooke. "So we swim—Kitty Alone and I."

Kate, more easy now that the boat was started, said, "You asked me my name. I said Kate Quarm."

"Well, but everyone knows you as Kitty Alone."

"And every one knows you as Jan Tottle, but I shouldn't have the face to so call you; and I don't see why you should give me any name than what properly belongs to me."

"Your father always so calls you."

"You are not my father, and have no right to take liberties. My father may call me what he pleases, because he is my father. He is my father—you my penny fare."

"And the penny fare has no rights?"

"He has right to be ferried over, not to be impudent."

Pooke whistled through his teeth.

The girl laboured hard at the oar; Pooke worked more easily. He had not realised at first how uncertain was the passage. The tide went swirling down to the sea with the wind behind it, driving it as a besom.

"I say, Kate Quarm—no, Miss Catherine Quarm. Hang it! how stiff and grand we be! Do you know why I have been to Exeter?"

"I do not, Jan."

"There, you called me Jan. You'll be 'titling me Tottle, next. That gives me a right to call you Kitty."

"Once, but no more; and Kitty only."

"I've been to Exeter to be rigged out for sister Sue's weddin'. My word! it has cost four guineas to make a gentleman of me."

"Can they do that for four guineas?"

"Now don't sneer. Listen. They'd took my measure afore, and they put me in my new suit, brass buttons and everything complete, and a new tie and collars standing to

my ears—and a box-hat curling at the sides like the waves of the ocean—and then they told me to walk this way, please sir! So I walked, and what should I see but a gentleman stately as a dook coming towards me, and I took off my hat and said, Your servant, sir! and would have stepped aside. Will you believe me, Kate! it was just myself in a great cheval glass, as they call it. You'll be at the wedding, won't you?—if only to see me in my new suit. I do believe you'll fall down and worship me, and I shall smile down at you and say, Holloa! is that my good friend Kitty Alone? And you'll say, Your very humble servant, sir!"

"That I shall never do, Mr. Pennyfare," laughed Kate, and then, becoming grave, immediately said, "Do pull instead of talking nonsense. We are drifting; look over your shoulder."

"So we are. There is Coombe Cellars light, right away up stream."

"The wind and stream are against us. Pull hard."

Jan Pooke now recognised that he must use his best exertions.

"Hang it!" said he, watching the light; "I don't want to be carried out to sea."

"Nor do I. That would be a dear penn'orth."

Pooke pulled vigorously; looked over his shoulder again and said, "Kate, give up your place to me. I'm worth more than you and me together with one oar apiece."

She moved the rowlock pins, and Jan took her place with two oars; but the time occupied in effecting the

change entailed loss of way, and the boat swept fast down the estuary.

"This is more than a joke," said Pooke; "we are down opposite Shaldon. I can see the Teignmouth lights. We shall never get across like this."

"We must."

"The tide tears between the end of the Den and the farther shore like a mill-race."

"We must cross or run aground."

"Kate, can you see the breakers over the bar?"

"No, but I can hear them. They are nothing now, as wind and tide are running off shore. When the tide turns then there will be a roar."

"I believe we are being carried out. Thunder! I'm not going to be swept into Kingdom Come without having put on box-hat and new suit, and cut a figure here."

The wind poured down the trough of the Teign valley with such force, that in one blast it seemed to catch the boat and drive it, as it might take up a leaf and send it flying over the surface of a hard road.

The waves were dancing, foaming, uttering their voices about the rocks of the Ness, mumbling and muttering on the bar. If the boat in the darkness were to get into the throat of the current, it would be sucked and carried into the turbulent sea; it might, however, get on the bar and be buffeted and broken by the waves.

"Take an oar," said Pooke; "we must bring her head round. If we can run behind the Den, we shall be in still water."

"Or mud," said Kate, seating herself to pull. "Anything but to be carried out to sea."

The two young people struggled desperately. They were straining against wind and tide, heading about to get into shallow water, and out of the tearing current.

After a while Kate gasped, "I'm finished!"

Her hair was blown round her head in the gale; with the rapidity of her pulsation, lights flashed before her eyes and waves roared in her ears.

"Don't give up. Pull away!"

Mechanically she obeyed. In another minute the strain was less, and then—the boat was aground.

"If this be the Den, all right," said Pooke. "We can get ashore and walk to Teignmouth." He felt with the oar, standing up in the boat. It sank in mud. "Here's a pretty pass," said he. "I thought it bad enough to be stuck in the tunnel when the Atmospheric broke down, but it is worse to be fast in the mud. From the tunnel we could extricate ourselves at once, but here—in this mud, we are fast till flow of tide. Kitty,—I mean Kate,—make up your mind to accept my company for some hours. I can't help you out, and I can't get out myself. What is more, no one on shore, even if we could call to them, would be able to assist us. Till the tide turns, we are held as tight as rats in a gin."

"I wonder," said the girl, recovering her breath, "what makes the tides ebb and flow."

"I don't know, and I don't care," said John Pooke; "it is enough for me that they have lodged us here on a mud

bank in a March night with an icy east wind blowing. By George! I've a mind to have out a summons against the Atmospheric Company."

"Why so?"

"For putting us in this blessed fix. The train came to a standstill in the tunnel by the Parson and Clerk rock, between Dawlish and Teignmouth. We had to tumble out of the carriages and shove her along into daylight. That is how my band-box got loose; as I got out of the carriage the string gave way and down went the box in the tunnel, and opened, and the hat came out. There was an east wind blowing like the blast of a blacksmith's bellows through the tunnel, and it caught my new hat and carried it along, as if it were the atmospheric train it had to propel. I had to run after it and catch it, all in the half-dark, and all the while the guard and passengers were yelling at me to help and shove along the train; but I wasn't going to do that till I had recovered my hat. I must think of sister Sue's wedding, and the figure I shall cut there, before I consider how to get the train out of a tunnel."

In spite of discomfort and cold, Kate was constrained to laugh.

"If you or I am the worse for this night in the cold, and if my box-hat has had the nap scratched off, and my new suit gets stained with sea-water, I'll summons the company, I will. What have you got to keep you warm, Kate?"

"A shawl."

"Let me feel it."

Pooke groped in the dark and caught hold of what the girl had cast over her head and shoulders.

"It's thin enough for a June evening," said he. "It may keep off dews, but it will not keep out frost. Please goodness, we shall have neither hail nor rain; that would be putting an edge on to our misery."

Both lapsed into silence. The prospect was cheerless. After about five minutes Kate said, "I wonder why there are twelve hours and a half between tides, and not twelve hours."

"I am sure I cannot tell," answered Pooke listlessly; he had his head in his hand.

"You see," remarked Kate, "if the tides were twelve hours exactly apart, there would always be flow at the same hour."

"I suppose so." Pooke spoke languidly, as if going to sleep.

"But that extra half-hour, or something like it, throws them out and makes them shift. Why is it?"

"How can I say? Accident."

"It cannot be accident, for people can calculate and put in the almanacks when the tides are to be."

"I suppose so."

"And then — why are some tides much bigger than others? We are having high tides now."

Pooke half rose, seated himself again, and said in a tone of desperation, "Look here, Kitty! I ain't going to be catechised. Rather than that, I'll jump into the mud and smother. It is bad enough having to sit here in the wind

half the night, without having one's head split with thinking to answer questions. If we are to talk, let it be about something sensible. Shall you be at sister Sue's wedding?'

"I do not know. That depends on whether aunt will let me go."

"I want you to see and worship me in my new suit."

"I may see—I shan't worship you."

"I almost bowed down to myself in the cheval glass, I looked so tremendous fine; and if I did that—what will you do?"

"Many a man worships himself whom others don't think much of."

"There you are at me again. Fancy — Kate — ducks"—

"And green peas?"

"No—bottle-green. Ducks is what I am going to wear, with straps under my boots—lily-white, and a yellow nankeen waistcoat, and a bottle-green coat with brass buttons,—all here in this parcel,—and the hat. My honour! I never was so fine before. Four guineas—with the hat."

"Do you call this 'talking sensible'?" asked Kate.

Again they subsided into silence. It was hard, in the piercing wind, in the darkness, to keep up an interest in any topic.

The cold cut like a razor. The wind moaned over the bulwarks of the ferry-boat. The mud exhaled a dead and unpleasant odour. Gulls fluttered near and screamed. The clouds overhead parted, and for a while exposed tracts of sky, thick strewn with stars that glittered frostily.

Presently the young man said, "Hang it! you will catch cold. Lie in the bottom of the boat, and I will throw my coat over you."

"But you will yourself be chilled."

"I—I am tough as nails. But stay. I know something better. I have my new bottle-green coat, splendid as the day. You shall have that over you."

"But it may become crumpled."

"Sister Sue shall iron it again."

"Or stained."

"You shan't die of cold just to save my bottle-green. Lie down. I wish the hat could be made to serve some purpose. There's no water in the boat?"

"None."

"And I am glad. It would have gone to my heart like a knife to have had to bale it out with my box-hat."

Kate was now very chilled. After the exertion, and the consequent heat in which she had been, the reaction had set in, and the blood curdled in her veins. The wind pierced the thin shawl as though it were a cobweb. Pooke folded up his garments to make a pillow for her head, insisted on her lying down, so that the side of the boat might in some measure screen her from the wind, and then he spread his new coat over her.

"There, Kitty. Hang it! we are comrades in ill-luck; so there is a brotherhood of misery between us. Let me call you Kitty, and let me be Jan to you—Tottle if you will."

"Only when you begin to boast about your new suit"—

"There, Kitty, don't be hard on me. I must think of something to keep me warm, and what else so warming as the thoughts of the ducks, and nankeen, and bottle-green, and the box-hat. I don't believe anything else could make me keep up my spirits. Go to sleep, and when I feel the boat lift, I will sing out."

Kate was touched by the kindness of the soft-headed lad. As she lay in the bottom of the boat without speaking, and he thought she was dozing, he put down his hand and touched the clothes about her. He wished to assure himself that she was well covered.

Kate was not asleep; she was thinking. She had not met with much consideration in the short span of her life. Lying in the boat with her eyes fixed on the stars, her restless mind was working.

Presently, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, she asked, "John, why do some of the stars twinkle and others do not?"

"How should I know? I suppose they were out on a spree when they ought to ha' been in bed, and now can't keep their eyes from winking."

"Some, however, burn quite steadily."

"Them's the good stars, that keep regular hours, and go to bed when they ought. Your eyes 'll be winking no end to-morrow."

"John, what becomes of the stars by day?"

"Kitty—Kate, don't ask any more questions, or I shall jump overboard. I can't bear it; I can't indeed. It makes my head ache."

CHAPTER VI

A CAPTURE

KATE QUARM had never felt a mother's love. She could not recall her mother, who had died when she was an infant. Her father, encumbered with a motherless babe, had handed the child over to his sister Zerah, a hard woman, who resented the infliction upon her in addition to the cares and solicitudes of her house. From her aunt Kate received no love. Her uncle paid to her no attention, save when he was provoked to rebuke by some noise made in childish play, or some damage done in childish levity.

Thus Kate had grown up to the verge of womanhood with all her affections buried in her bosom. That dark heart was like a cellar stored with flower bulbs and roots. They are not dead, they send forth bleached and sickly shoots without vigour and incapable of bloom. Hers was a tender, craving nature, one that hungered for love; and as she received none, wherever she turned, to whomsoever she looked, she had become self-contained, reserved, and silent. Her aunt thought her sullen and obstinate.

As already related, Mrs. Pepperill had not been always

childless. She had possessed a daughter, Wilmot, who had been the joy and pride of her heart. Wilmot had been a bright, merry girl, with fair hair and forget-me-not blue eyes, and cheeks in which the lily was commingled with the rose. Wilmot was a born coax and coquette; she cajoled her mother to give her what she desired, and she flattered her father into humouring her caprices.

Naturally, the reserved, pale Kate was thrown into shadow by the forward, glowing Wilmot; and the parents daily contrasted their own child with that of the brother, and always to the disadvantage of the latter.

Wilmot had a mischievous spirit, and delighted in teasing and tyrannising over her cousin. Malevolent she was not, but inconsiderate; she was spoiled, and, as a spoiled child, capricious and domineering. She liked—in her fashion, loved—Kate, as she liked and loved a plaything, that she might trifle with and knock about; not as a playfellow, to be considered and conciliated. Association with Wilmot hardly in any degree brightened the existence of Kate; it rather served to cloud it. Petty wrongs, continuous setting back, repeated slights, wounded and crushed a naturally expansive and susceptible nature. Kate hardly ventured to appeal to her father or to her aunt against her cousin, even when that cousin's treatment was most unjust and insupportable; the aunt naturally sided with her own child, and the father heedlessly laughed at Kate's troubles as undeserving of consideration.

Then, suddenly, Wilmot was attacked by fever, which carried her off in three days. The mother was inconsolable.

The light went out of her life with the extinction of the vital spark in the bosom of her child.

The death of Wilmot was of no advantage to Kate. She was no longer, indeed, given over to the petty tyranny of her cousin, but she was left exposed to a hardened and embittered aunt, who resented on her the loss of her own child. Into the void heart of Zerah, Kate had no chance of finding access; that void was filled with discontent, verjuice, and acrimony. An unreasonable anger against the child who was not wanted and yet remained, in place of the child who was the apple of her eye, and was taken from her, made itself felt in a thousand ways.

Without being absolutely unkind to her, Zerah was ungracious. She held Kate at arm's length, spoke to her in harsh and peremptory tones, looked at her with contracted pupils and with puckered brow. Filled with resentment against Providence, she made the child feel her disappointment and antagonism. The reserve, the lack of light-heartedness in the child told against her, and Zerah little considered that this temperament was produced by her own ungenerous treatment.

At the time of this story, Kate was of real service in the house. The Pepperills kept no domestic servant; they required none, having Kate, who was made to do whatever was necessary. Her aunt was an energetic and industrious woman, and Kate served under her direction. She assisted in the household washing, in the work of the garden, in the feeding of the poultry, in the kitchen, in all household work; and when folk came to eat cockles and drink tea,

Kate was employed as waitress. For all this she got no wage, no thanks, no forbearance, no kind looks, certainly no kind words.

The girl's heart was sealed up, unread, misunderstood by those with whom she was brought into contact. She had made no friends at school, had no comrades in the village; and her father inconsiderately accepted and applied to her a nickname given her at school by her teacher, a certain Mr. Solomon Puddicombe,—a nickname derived from the burden of a foolish folk-song, "Kitty Alone."

Now the girl lay in the bottom of the boat, under Pooke's Exeter tailor-made clothes, shivering. What would her father think of her absence? Would he be anxious, and waiting up for her? Would Aunt Zerah be angry, and give her hard words?

Her eyes peered eagerly at the stars—into that great mystery above.

"They are turning," she said.

"What are turning?" asked Pooke. "Ain't you asleep, as you ought to be?"

"When I was waiting for you at the Hard, I saw them beginning to twinkle."

"What did you see?"

"Yonder, those stars. There are four making a sort of a box, and then three more in a curve."

"That is the Plough."

"Well, it is something like a plough. It is turning about in the sky. When I was waiting for the Atmo-

spheric, I saw it in one way, and now it is all turned about different."

"I daresay it is."

"But why does it turn about?"

"When I've ploughed to one end of a field, I turn the plough so as to run back."

"But this isn't a real plough."

"I know nothing about it," said Pooke desperately; "and, what is more, I won't stand questioning. This is a ferry-boat, not a National School, and you are Kitty Quarm, not Mr. Puddicombe. I haven't anything more of learning to go through the rest of my days, thankful to say."

The night crept along, slow, chilly as a slug; the time seemed interminable. Benumbed by cold, Kate finally dozed without knowing that she was slipping out of consciousness. Sleep she did not—she was in a condition of uneasy terror, shivering with cold, cramped by her position, bruised by the ribs of the boat, with the smell of mud and new cloth in her nose, and with occasionally a brass button touching her cheek, and with its cold stabbing as with a needle. The wind, curling and whistling in the boat as it came over the side, bored into the marrow of the bones, the muscles became hard, the flesh turned to wax.

Kate discovered that she had been unconscious only by the confusion of her intellect when Pooke roused her by a touch, and told her that the boat was afloat. She staggered to her knees, brushed the scattered hair out of her dazed eyes, rose to her feet, and seated herself on the bench. Her wits were as though curdled in her brains.

They would not move. Every limb was stiff, every nerve ached. Her teeth chattered; she felt sick and faint. Sleepily she looked around.

No lights were twinkling from the windows on the banks. In every house candles had long ago been extinguished. All the world slept.

The clouds overhead had been brushed away, and the lights of heaven looked down and were reflected in the water. The boat was as it were floating between two heavens besprent with stars, the one above, the other below, and across each was drawn the silvery nebulous Milky Way. The constellation of the Great Bear—the Plough, as Pooke called it—was greatly changed in position since Kate had commented on it. Cassiopēa's silver chair was planted in the great curve of the Milky Way. To the south the hazy tangle of Berenice's Hair was faintly reflected in the inflowing tide.

Although the boat was lifted from the bank, yet it was by no means certain that Coombe Cellars could be reached for at least another half-hour. The tide, that had raced out, seemed to return at a crawl. Nevertheless, it was expedient to restore circulation by the exercise of the arms. Kate assumed one oar, John the other, and began to row; she at first with difficulty, then with ease, as warmth returned and her blood resumed its flow. The swelling tide carried the boat up with it, and the oars were leisurely dipped, breaking the diamonds in the water into a thousand brilliants.

As they approached the reach where lay Coombe-in-

Teignhead, John Pooke said: "There is a light burning in your house. They are all up, anxious, watching for you, and in trouble. On my word, will not my father be in a condition of fright and distress concerning me if he hears that I am out? I went off without saying anything to anybody. I intended to be back all right in the evening by the Atmospheric. But there's no telling, father may have been asking after me. Then, as I didn't turn up at supper, he may have sent about making inquiries, and have heard at the Cellars that I'd gone over the water, and given command to be met by the last train. Then they will be in a bad state of mind, father and sister Sue. Hulloa! what is that light? It comes from our place."

John Pooke rested on his oar, and turned.

From behind an orchard a glow, as of fire, was shining. It had broken forth suddenly. The light streamed between the trees, sending fiery arrows shooting over the water, it rose in a halo above the tops of the trees.

"Kate! whatever can it be? That is our orchard. There is our rick-yard behind. It never can be that our ricks are afire, or our house! The house is just beyond. The blaze is at our place—pull hard!"

"It's a chance if there is water enough to carry us ashore."

Then, from above the belt of orchard broke lambent flame, and cast up tufts of ignited matter into the air, to be caught and carried away by the strong wind. Now there lay a fiery path between the ferry-boat and the shore. Pooke seated himself. He was greatly agitated.

"Kate, it is our rick-yard. That chap, Roger, has done it."

The words had hardly escaped him before a boat shot past, and his oar clashed with that of the rower in that boat. As it passed, John saw the face of the man who was rowing, kindled by the orange blaze from the shore. The recognition was instantaneous.

"Redmore, it is you!" Then breathlessly, "Kate, about! we must catch him. He has set our ricks ablaze."

The boat was headed round, and the young arms bent at the oars, and the little vessel flew in pursuit. The man they were pursuing rowed clumsily, and with all his efforts made little way, so that speedily he was overtaken, and Jan ran the ferry-boat against the other, struck the oar out of the hands of the rower, and flung himself upon the man, and gripped him.

"Kate—hold the boats together."

Then ensued a furious struggle. Both men were strong. The position in which both were was difficult—Jan Pooke half in one boat, half in the other, but Roger Redmore grasped at the seat in his boat, while holding an oar in his right hand.

The flaring rick sent a yellow light over them. The boats reeled and clashed together, and clashing drifted together with the tide up the river, past Coombe Cellars. Pooke, unable as he was to master his man, cast himself wholly into his adversary's boat. Redmore had let go the oar, and now staggered to his feet. The men, wrestling,

tossed in the rolling boat, fell, were up on their knees, and then down again in the bottom.

"Quick, Kate!" shouted Jan. "I have him! Quick! —the string of my parcel."

Kate handed him what he desired.

In another moment Pooke was upright. "He is safe," said he, panting. "I have bound his wrists behind his back. Now—Kate!"

The boats had run ashore, a little way above the Cellars, drifted to the strand by the flowing tide.

"Kate," said Pooke, jumping out, "you hold that cord—here. I have fastened it round the rowlock. He can't release himself. Hold him, whilst I run for help. We will have him tried—he shall swing for this! Do you know that, Roger Redmore? What you have done is no joke—it will bring you to the gallows!"

CHAPTER VII

A RELEASE

KATE sat in her boat holding the string that was twisted round the rowlock and that held Roger Redmore's hands bound behind his back. He was crouched in the bottom of the boat, sunken into a heap, hanging by his hands. Now and then he made a convulsive effort with his shoulders to release his arms, but was powerless. He could not scramble to his feet, held down as he was behind. He turned his face, and from over Coombe Cellars, where the sky was alight with fire, a glow came on his countenance.

"You be Kitty Alone?" said he.

Kate hardly answered. Her heart was fluttering; her head giddy with alarm and distress, coming after a night's exposure in the open boat. As yet, no sign of dawn in the east; only the flames from the burning farm-produce lighted up the sky to the south-west, and were reflected in the in-flowing water.

The agricultural riots which had filled the south of England with terror at the close of 1830 were, indeed, a thing of the past, but the reminiscence of them lay deep in

the hearts of the labourers; and for ten and fifteen years after, at intervals, there were fresh outbreaks of incendiarism. There was, indeed, no fresh organisation of bodies of men going about the country, destroying machinery and firing farms, but in many a district the threat of the firebrand was still employed, and the revenge of a fire among the stacks and barns was so easy, and so difficult to bring home to the incendiary, that it was long before the farmer could feel himself safe. Indeed, nothing but the insurance office prevented this method of obtaining revenge from being had recourse to very frequently. When every dismissed labourer or workman who had met with a sharp reprimand could punish the farmer by thrusting a match among his ricks, fires were common; but when it became well known that an incendiary fire hurt not the farmer, but an insurance company, the malevolent and resentful no longer had recourse to this method of injury.

In the "Swing" riots many men had been hung or transported for the crimes then committed, and the statute against arson passed in the reign of George IV., making such an offence felony, and to be punished capitally, was in force, and not modified till much later. When, therefore, Jan Pooke threatened Redmore with the gallows, he threatened him with what the unhappy man knew would be his fate if convicted.

Kate was acquainted with the story of Roger. He had been a labourer on Mr. Pooke's farm. He was a morose man, with a sickly wife and delicate children, occupying a cottage on the farm. At Christmas the man had taken

a drop too much, and had been insolent to his master. The intoxication might have been forgiven—not so the impertinence. He was at once discharged, and given notice to quit his cottage at Lady Day. For nearly three months the man had been out of work. In winter there is no demand for additional hands; no great undertakings are prosecuted. All the farmers were supplied with workmen, and had some difficulty in the frosty weather in finding occupation for them. None were inclined to take on Roger Redmore. Moreover, the farmers hung together like bees. A man who had offended one, incurred the displeasure of all.

Redmore wandered from one farm to another, seeking for employment, only to meet with refusal everywhere. In a day or two he would be cast forth from his cottage with wife and family. Whither to go he knew not. He had exhausted what little money he had saved, and had nowhere found work. Kate felt pity for the man. He had transgressed, and his transgression had fallen heavy upon him. He was not an intemperate man; he did not frequent the public-house. Others who drank, and drank hard, remained with their masters, who overlooked their weakness. In the forefront of Roger's offence stood his insolence; and Pooke, the richest yeoman in the place, was proud, and would not forgive a wound to his pride.

As Kate held the string, she felt that the wretched man was shivering. He shook in his boat, and chattered its side against her boat.

"Are you very cold?" asked the girl.

"I'm hungry," he answered sullenly.

"You are trembling."

"I've had nor bite nor crumb for forty-eight hours. That's enough to make a man shake."

"Nothing to eat? Did you not ask for something?"

"I went to the Rectory. Passon Fielding gave me a loaf, but I took it home—wife and little ones were more starving than I, and I cut it up between 'em."

"I think—I almost think I have a piece of bread with me," said Kate. She had, in fact, taken some in her pocket the night before, when she crossed, and had forgotten to eat it, or had no appetite for it. Now she produced the slice.

"I cannot take it," said the bound man. "My hands be tied fast behind me. You must please put it into my mouth; and the Lord bless you for it."

Holding the cord with her right, Kate extended the bread with the other hand to the man, whose face was averted, and thrust it between his lips.

"You must hold your hand to my mouth while I eat," said he. "I wouldn't miss a crumb, and it will fall if you take your hand from me."

Consequently, with her hand full of bread much broken, she fed the unfortunate man, and he ate it out of her palm. He ate greedily till he had consumed the last particle.

It moved Kate to the heart to feel the hungry wretch's lips picking the crumbs out of her palm.

"Oh, Roger!" she said in a tone full of compassion

and sorrow, rather than reproach, "why—why did you do it?"

"Do what, Kitty?"

"Oh, burn the stack!"

"I'll tell you why. I couldn't help it. Did you know my Joan? Her was the purtiest little maid in all Coombe. Her's dead now."

"Dead, Roger!"

"Ay, I reckon; died to-night in her mother's lap; died o' want, and cold, and nakedness. Us had no bread till Pass'n gave me that loaf — and no coals, and no blankets, and naught but rags. The little maid has been sick these three weeks. Us can't have no doctor. I've been out o' work three months, and now the parish must bury her. Joan, she wor my very darling, nigh my heart."

He was silent. The boat he was in chattered more vigorously against that of Kate.

"I knowed," he pursued, "I knowed what ha' done it. It wor Farmer Pooke throwed me out of employ—took the bread out o' our mouths. Us had a bit o' candle-end, and I wor down on my knees beside my wife, and little Joan lyin' on her lap; and wife and I neither could speak; us couldn't pray; us just watched the poor little maid passin' away."

He was silent, but Kate heard that he was sobbing. Presently he said, "You've been kind. If you've got a bit o' handkercher or what else, wipe my face with it, will'y. There's something, the dew or the salt water from the oars, splashed over it."

The girl passed her shawl over the man's face.

"Thank'y kindly," he said. Then he drew a long breath and continued his story. "Well, now, when wife and I saw as little Joan were gone home, then her rose up and never said a word, but laid her on our ragged bed; and I—I had the candle-end in my hand, and I put it into the lantern, and I went out. My heart were full o' gall and bitterness, and my head were burning. I know'd well who'd killed our Joan; it were Farmer Pooke as turned me out o' employ all about a bit o' nonsense I said and never meant, and when I wor sober never remembered to ha' said; so, mad wi' sorrow and anger, I—I gone and done it with that there bit o' candle-end."

"Oh, Roger, Roger! you have made matters much worse for yourself, for all."

"I might ha' made it worser still."

"You could not—now. Oh, what will become of you, and what of your poor wife and little ones?"

"For me, as Jan Tottle said, there's the gallows; and I reckon for my Jane and the childer, there's the grave."

"If you had not fired the rick, Roger!"

"I tell you I might ha' done worse than that, and now been a free man."

"I cannot see that."

"Put your hand down by my right thigh. Do you feel nothing there, hanging to the strap round my waist?"

Kate felt a string and a knife, a large knife, as she groped.

"Do you mean this, Roger?"

"Yes, I does. As Jan Tottle wor a-wrastlin' wi' me here in this boat, and trying to overmaster me, the thought came into my head as I might easy take my knife and run it in under his ribs and pierce his heart. Had I done that, he'd ha' falled dead here, and I'd a' gotten scot-free away."

"Roger!"

Kate shrank away in horror.

"I didn't do it, but I might. I'd no quarrel with young Jan. He's good enough. It's the old fayther be the hard and cruel one. I knowed what was afore me, as young Jan twisted and turned and threw me. I must be took to Exeter gaol, and there be hanged by the neck till dead—but I wouldn't stain my hands wi' an innocent lad's blood. I wouldn't have it said of my little childer they was come o' a murderin' villain."

Kate shuddered. Still holding fast the cord that constrained the man, and kept him in his position of helplessness, she drew back from him as far as she could without surrendering her hold.

"I had but to put down my hand and slip open my clasp-knife—and I would have been free, and Jan lying here in his blood."

She hardly breathed. A band as of iron seemed to be about her breast and tightening.

"Kitty," said the man, "you have fed me with bread out of your hand, and with your hand you have wiped the salt tears from my eyes. With that hand will you give me over to the gallows? If you do, my death will lie on you, and those of my Jane and the little ones."

"Roger, I am here in trust."

"I spared Jan. Can you not spare me?"

Kate trembled. She hardly breathed.

"Let me go, and I swear to you—I swear by all those ten thousand eyes o' heaven looking down on us—that I will do for you what you have done for me."

"That is an idle promise," said Kate; "you never can do that."

"Who can say what is to be, or is not to be? Let me go, for my wife and poor children's sake."

She did not answer.

"Let me go because I spared Jan Pooke."

She did not move.

"Let me go for the little dead Joan's sake—that when she lies i' the churchyard, they may not say of her, 'Thickey there green mound, wi' them daisies on it, covers a poor maid whose father were hanged.'"

Then Kate let go the string, it ran round the rowlock, and the man scrambled to his feet.

"Cut it with my knife," he said.

She took the swinging knife, opened the blade, and with a stroke cut through the cord that held his wrists.

Then Roger Redmore shook the strings from his hands, and held up his freed arms to heaven, and cried, "The Lord, who sits enthroned above thickey shining stars, reward you and help me to do for you as you ha' done for me. Amen."

He leaped from the boat and was lost in the darkness.

A minute later, and John Pooke, with a party of men among whom was Pasco Pepperill, came up.

"John," said Kate, "he is gone—escaped."

She drew the young man aside. "I will not deceive you—I let him go. He begged hard. He might have killed you. His little Joan is dead."

John Pooke was at first staggered, and inclined to be angry, but he speedily recovered himself. He was a good-natured lad, and he said in a low tone, "Tell no one else. After all, it is best. I shouldn't ha' liked to have appeared against him, and been the occasion of his death."

Kate returned with her uncle to Coombe Cellars.

"I hope my new boat is no worse," said he. "How is it you've been out all night?"

Kate told her story.

"The boat is all right, I suppose. She cost me six pounds."

"Yes; no harm is done to it. I hope aunt has not been anxious about me."

"What, Zerah? Oh, she's in bed. I waited up, and when there was a cry of fire ran out."

"You waited for me, uncle?"

"I had my accounts."

"And father—was he anxious about me?"

"Your father? You come in, and you'll hear his snore all over the house. He's a terrible noisy sleeper."

CHAPTER VIII

AN ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE

AFTER the fierce north-east wind came one from the south-east, whose wings were laden with moisture, and which cast cold showers over the earth. It is said that a breath from this quarter brings a downpour that continues unintermittently for forty-eight hours. On this occasion, however, the rain was not incessant. The sky lowered when it did not send down its showers, and these latter were cold and unfertilising. "February fill dyke, March dry it up," is the saying, but March this year was one of rain, and February had been a month of warmth and sunshine, which had forced on all vegetation, which March was cutting with its cruel frosts and beating down with its pitiless rains.

That had come about in Coombe Cellars which might have been anticipated. Kate had been sent across the water with the scantiest provision against cold, and with no instruction as to how to act in the event of delay of the atmospheric train. She was not a strong child, and the bitter cold had cut her to the marrow. On the morning following she was unable to rise, and by night she was in a burning fever.

Kate had an attic room where there was no grate—a room lighted by a tiny window that looked east across the river.

Against the panes the rain pattered, and the water dripped from the eaves upon the window-ledge with the monotonous sound of the death-watch. Hard by was the well-head of a fall-pipe, in which birds had made their nests, and had so choked it that the water, unable to descend by the pipe, squirted and plashed heavily on the slates below.

A candle, brought from the kitchen, stood on the window-shelf guttering in the wind that found its way through the ill-fitting lattice and cracked diamond panes. It cast but an uncertain shimmer over the face of the sick girl.

On the floor stood an iron rushlight-holder, the sides pierced with round holes. In this a feeble rushlight burned slowly.

Beside the bed sat Mrs. Pepperill, and the old rector of Coombe-in-Teignhead stood with bowed head, so as not to knock his crown against the ceiling, looking intently at the girl. Zerah was uneasy. Her conscience reproached her. She had acted inconsiderately, if not wrongly, in sending her niece across the water. She was afraid lest she should be blamed by the parson, and lest her conduct should be commented on by the parish.

She reasoned with herself, without being able thoroughly to still the qualms of her conscience. What cause had she to suppose that the train would not arrive punctually? How could she have foreseen that it would come in so late

that it made it impossible for Kate to cross in the then condition of the tide? Had Jan Pooke arrived but ten minutes earlier than he did, then, unquestionably, the boat would have come over, if not at Coombe Cellars, yet somewhat lower down the river. She was not gifted with the prophetic faculty. She had so many things to occupy her mind that she could not provide for every contingency. Should the child die, no blame—no reasonable blame—could attach to her. The fault lay with Mr. Brunel, who had laid down the atmospheric railway; with the engineer at the Teignmouth exhausting-pump, who had not done his duty properly; with the guard of the train, who had not seen that the rollers for opening and closing the valves did their work properly; with John Pooke, for delaying over his hat that he had let fall; with Jason Quarm, for not offering to ferry the boat in the place of his daughter, instead of staying over the fire with her husband, filling his head with mischievous nonsense about making money out of mud and sinking capital which would never come to the surface again. Finally, the fault lay with Providence, that blind and inconsiderate power, which had robbed her of Wilmot, and now had not retarded the ebb by ten minutes, which might easily have been effected by shifting the direction of the wind to the south-west.

The feeble light flickered in the window, and almost in the same manner did the life of the girl flicker, burning itself away as the candle guttered in the overmuch and irregular heat, now quivering under the in-rush of draught, hissing blue and faint, and ready to expire, then flaring up

in exaggerated incandescence. The cheeks flushed, the eyes burned with unnatural light, and the pulse ebbed and flowed.

"Where do the stars go by day?" asked Kate in delirium; "and why does the Plough turn in heaven? Is God's hand on it?"

"My child," said the parson, "God's plough in the earth is the frost, that cuts deep and turns and crumbles the clods ready for the seed; and God's plough on human hearts is great sorrow and sharp disappointment—to make the necessary furrow into which to drop the seeds of faith, and love, and patience."

"She is not speaking to you, sir," said Mrs. Pepperill. "She's talking rambling like. But she's terrible at questions—always."

The clergyman held his hands folded behind his back, and looked intently at the fevered face. The eyes were bright, but not with intelligence. Kate neither recognised him, nor understood what he said.

"I wonder now where the doctor is?" said Zerah. "I reckon he has gone to some patient who can pay a guinea where we pay seven shillings and sixpence. Doctor Mant will be with such twice a day—as we are poor, he will come to us only now and then."

"You judge harshly. You have but just sent for him."

"I did not think Kate was bad enough to need a doctor."

"God is the Great Physician. Put your trust in Him."

"That is what you said when Wilmot was ill. I lost her all the same."

"It was the will of Heaven. God's plough, maybe, was needed."

"In what way did I deserve to be so treated? My beautiful child! my own, very very own child." Zerah's eyes filled, but her lips contracted, making crow-feet at the corners. "I have had left to me instead this cold-hearted creature, my niece, who can in no way make up to me for what I have lost. I've had a sovereign taken from me and a ha'penny left in my hand."

"God has given you this child to love and care for. For His own wise purposes He took away Wilmot, whom you were spoiling with over-much affection and blind admiration. Now He would have you love and cherish the treasure He has left in your hands."

"Treasure?"

"Ay, treasure. Love her."

"Of course I love her! I do my duty by her."

"You have done your duty—of that I have no doubt. But how have you done it? Do you know, Mrs. Pepperill, there are two ways in which everything may be done—as a duty to God, in the spirit of bondage or in the spirit of love? So with regard to the image of God in this innocent and suffering child. You may do your duty perfunctorily or in charity."

"I do it in charity. Her father has not paid a penny for her keep."

"That is not what I mean; charity is the spirit of love.

There are two minds in which man may stand before God, to everything, to everyone—there is the servant mind and the filial mind, the duty mind, and the mind of love. And with what mind have you treated this child?" The parson put his hand to Kate's brow and drew back from it the dark hair, sweeping the locks aside with his trembling fingers.

"Look," said he. "What a forehead she has got—what a brow! full, full, full of thought. This is no common head—there is no vulgar brain in this poor little skull."

"Wilmot had a head and brains," said Mrs. Pepperill, "and her forehead was higher and whiter."

Zerah's conscience was stinging her. What the rector said was true, and the consciousness that it was true made her angry.

Would she have sent Wilmot across the water insufficiently protected against the east wind? would she have done this without weighing the chances of the atmospheric railway breaking down? If death were to snatch this child from her, she would ever feel that some responsibility had weighed on her. However much she might shift the blame, some of it must adhere to her.

She had not been kind to the motherless girl. It was true she had not been unkind to her; but then Kate had a right to a share of her heart. She had valued her niece chiefly as a foil to her daughter; and when the latter died, her feelings toward Kate had been dipped in wormwood.

Zerah was not a bad woman, but she was a disappointed woman. She was disappointed in her husband, disap-

pointed in her child. Her heart was not congealed, nor was her conscience dead, but both were in a torpid condition.

Now, as by the glimmer of the swaling candle she looked on the suffering girl, the ice about her heart cracked—a warm gush of pity, an ache of remorse, came upon her; she bowed and kissed the arched brow of her niece.

The rector knelt and prayed in silence. He loved the intelligent child in his Sunday school—the nightingale in his church choir. Zerah obeyed his example.

Then both heard the stair creak, and a heavy tread sounded on the boards.

Mrs. Pepperill looked round, but the irregular tread would have told her who had entered the attic chamber without the testimony of her eyes. She stood up and signed to Jason Quarm to be less noisy in his movements.

"Pshaw!" said he; "it is nothing. Kitty will get over it. You, Zerah, are tough. I am tough. Leather toughness is the characteristic of us Quarms. When she is better, send her to me—to the moor. That will set her up."

The rector rose.

Jason went to the head of the bed and laid his large hand on the sick girl's brow. The coolness of his palm seemed to do her good.

"You see—it comforts the little toad," said her father. "There is nothing to alarm you in the case. Children are like corks. They go under water and are up again—mostly up. Dipping under is temporary — temporary and soon

over. Parson, do you want to speculate? I am buying oak dirt cheap—to sell at a tremendous profit. Ten per cent. at the least. What do you say?"

The rector shook his head.

"Well, I shouldn't go away from Coombe with Kitty ill but that I expect to make my fortune and hers. She'll have a dower some day out of the Brimpts oaks."

Then the man stumped out of the room and down the steep stairs.

Jason Quarm was always sanguine.

"Do you think Kate will live?" asked Zerah, who did not share his views.

"I trust so," answered the rector. "If she does, then regard her as a gift from heaven. Once before she was put, a frail and feeble object, into your arms to rear and cherish. You were then too much engrossed in your daughter to give to this child your full attention. Your own Wilmot has been taken away. Now your niece has been almost withdrawn from you. But the hand that holds the issues of life and death spares her; she is committed to you once more—again helpless, frail, and committed to you that you may envelop her in an atmosphere of LOVE."

"I have loved her," said Mrs. Pepperill. "This is the second time, sir, that you have charged me with lack of love towards Kate."

"Wilmot," said the rector, "was one who stormed the heart. She went up against it, with flags flying and martial music, and broke in at the point of the bayonet. Kate's

nature is different. She will storm no heart. She sits on the doorstep as a beggar, and does not even knock and solicit admission. Throw open your door, extend your hand, and the timid child will falter in, frightened, yet elate with hope."

"I don't know," said Zerah meditatively. "You'll excuse my saying it, but when a child is heartless"—

"Heartless?—who is heartless?"

"Kate, to be sure."

"Heartless?" repeated the rector. "You are in grievous error. No child is heartless. None of God's creatures are void of love. God is love Himself, and we are all made in the image of the Creator. In all of us is the divine attribute of love. We were made to love and to be loved. It is a necessity of our nature. This poor little spirit—with how much love has it been suckled? With how much has its nakedness been clothed? The cream of your heart's affection was given to your own daughter, and only the whey—thin and somewhat acidulated—offered to the niece. Turn over a new leaf, Mrs. Pepperill. Treat this child in a manner different from that in which she has been treated. I allow frankly that you have not been unkind, unjust, ungracious. But such a soul as this cannot flower in an atmosphere of negatives. You know something about the principle on which the atmospheric railway acts, do you not, Mrs. Pepperill? There is a pump which exhausts the air. Now put a plant, an animal, into a vessel from which the vital air has been withdrawn, and plant or animal will die at once. It has been given nothing

deleterious, nothing poisonous has been administered. It dies simply because it has been deprived of that atmosphere in which God ordained that it should live and flourish. My good friend," said the rector, and his voice shook with mingled tenderness of feeling and humour, "if I were to take you up and set you under the exhausting apparatus, and work at the pump, you would gasp—gasp and die."

The woman turned cold and blank at the suggestion.

"If I did that," continued the parson, "the coroner who sat on you would pronounce that you had been murdered by me. I should be sent to the assizes, and should infallibly be hung. Very well: there are other kinds of murder than killing the body. There is the killing of the noble, divine nature in man, and that not by acts of violence only, but by denial of what is essential to its existence. Remember this, Mrs. Pepperill: what the atmosphere is to the lungs, that love is to the heart. God created the lungs to be inflated with air, and the heart to be filled with Love."

CHAPTER IX

CONVALESCENCE

THE voice of Pasco was heard shouting up the stairs to his wife. Mrs. Pepperill, glad to escape the lecture, went to the door and called down, "Don't make such a noise, when the girl is ill."

"Come, will you, Zerah; there's some one wants to have a say with you."

With a curt excuse to the parson, Mrs. Pepperill descended. She found her husband at the foot of the stairs, with his hand on the banister.

"Pasco," said she, "what do'y think now? The parson has been accusing me of murdering Kate. If she dies, he says he'll have me up to Exeter Assizes and hung for it. I'll never set foot in church again, never—I'll join the Primitive Methodists."

"As you please," said her husband. "But go to the door at once. There is John Pooke waiting, and won't be satisfied till he has had a talk with you about Kate. He wants to know all about Kitty—how she's doing, whether she's in danger, if she wants anything that the Pookes can supply. He's hanging about the door like what they call

a morbid fly. He's in a terrible taking, and won't be put off with what I can tell."

"Well, now," exclaimed Zerah, "here's an idea! Something may come of that night on a mud-bank after all, and more than she deserves. Oh my! if my Wilmot was alive, and Jan Pooke were to inquire after her! Go up, Pasco, and send that parson away. I won't speak to him again—abusing of me and calling me names shameful, and he an ordained minister. What in the world are we coming to?"

When the doctor arrived, he pronounced that he would pull Kate through.

Presently the delirium passed away, and on the following morning the light of intelligence returned to her eyes.

"They are still there," she said eagerly, raising her head and listening.

"What are still there?" asked her aunt.

"The gulls."

In fact, these animated foam-flakes of the ocean were about in vast numbers, uttering their peculiar cries as they hovered over the mud.

"Of course they are there—why not?"

"Father said he was going to make ladies' waistcoats of them, and I've been fretting and crying—and then, the daffodils"—

"Oh, bother the daffodils and the gulls! They may wait a long while before waistcoats are made of them."

"It is not of daffodils father was going to make waistcoats. He said he would have all the gulls shot."

"Never worrit your head about that. The birds can take care of themselves and fly away to sea."

"But the daffodils cannot get away. He was going to have a scythe and mow them all down and sell them."

"Wait till folk are fools enough to buy."

There was much to be done in the house. Mrs. Pepperill was unable to be always in the room with her niece. It was too early in the year for pleasure parties to come up the river in boats for tea or coffee, winkles and cockles, in the open air, but the house itself exacted attention — the cooking, the washing, had to be done. Now that Zerah was deprived of the assistance of her niece, perhaps for the first time did she realise how useful the girl had been to her. By night Kate was left alone; there was no space in the attic chamber for a second bed, nor did her condition require imperatively that some one should be with her all night.

When her consciousness returned, Kate woke in the long darkness, and watched the circular spots of light that danced on the walls and careered over the floor, as the rushlight flickered in the draught between window and door. Above, on the low ceiling, was the circle of light, broad and yellow as the moon, cast by the candle, its rays unimpeded in that direction, but all round was the perforated rim, and through that the rays shot and painted stars—stars at times moving, wheeling, glinting; and Kate, in a half-torpid condition, thought she could make out among them the Plough with its curved tail, and wondered whether it were turning. Then she passed into dreamland,

and woke and saw in the spots of light the white pearls of her uncle's neckcloth, and was puzzled why they did not remain stationary. Whilst vexing her mind with this question she slid away into unconsciousness again, and when next her eyes opened, it was to see an orchard surrounding her, in which were daffodils that flickered, and she marvelled what that great one was above on the ceiling, so much larger than all the rest. Always, whenever with the ebb the gulls came up the river in thousands, and their laugh rang into the little room, it was to Kate as though a waft of sea-air blew over her hot face; and she laughed also, and said to herself, "They are not yet made into waistcoats."

Occasionally she heard under her window a whistle piping, "There was a frog lived in a well," and she once asked her aunt if that were father, and why he did not come upstairs to see her.

"Your father is on Dartmoor," answered Zerah. Then, with a twinkle in her eye, she added, "I reckon it is Jan Pooke. He has taken on terribly about you. He comes every day to inquire."

Whenever Mrs. Pepperill had a little spare time, she clambered up the steep staircase to see that her niece lacked nothing, to give her food, to make her take medicine, to shake up her bed. And every time that she thus mounted, she muttered, "So, I am killing her with cruelty! The only suitable quarters for me is Exeter gaol; the proper end for me is the gallows! I have put her into one of the atmospheric engine-towers and have pumped the life out

of her! And yet, I'm blessed if I'm not run off my legs going up and down these stairs! If I ain't a ministering angel to her; if she doesn't cost me pounds in doctor's bills; I don't begrudge it—but I'm a murderess all the same!"

Certain persons are mentally incapable of understanding a simile; a good many are morally unwilling to apply one to themselves. Whether, when it was spoken, Mrs. Pepperill comprehended or not the bearing of the rector's simile relative to the exhausting engine, in the sequel she came to entirely misconceive it, and to distort it into something quite different from what the speaker intended. That was easily effected. She was quite aware that much that the parson had said was true; her conscience tingled under his gentle reproof; but no sooner was that unfortunate simile uttered, than her opportunity came for evading the cogency of his reproach, and for working herself up into resentment against him for having charged her falsely. That is one of the dangers that lurk in the employment of hyperbole, and one of the advantages hyperbole gives to those addressed in reprimand with it. Zerah had sufficient readiness of wit to seize on the opportunity, and use her occasion against the speaker, and in self-vindication.

The rector had not said that Zerah was depriving her niece of vital air; that mattered not—he had said that she was depriving her of what was as essential to life as vital air.

"It is my own blessed self that I am killing," said Mrs. Pepperill; "running up these stairs ten hundred times in

the day, my heart jumping furiously, and pumping all the vital air out of my lungs. I'm sure I can't breathe when I get up into Kate's room. And he don't call that love! He ought to be unfrocked by the bishop."

She came into the girl's chamber red in the face and puffing, and went direct to her.

"There, now; I'm bothered if something does not come of it to your advantage and mine, Kate, for I'm tired of having to care about you. Jan Pooke has been here again. That's the second time to-day; of course asking after you. There is no one in the family but Jan and his sister, and she is about to be married. The Pookes have a fine farm and money in the bank. If you manage matters well, you'll cut out that conceited minx, Rose, who has marked him down. Come, you are a precious!"

She stooped to kiss Kate, but the girl suddenly turned her face with a flaming cheek to the wall.

Zerah tossed her head and said to herself, "Love? she won't love! I was about to kiss her, and she would not have it."

Then she got her needlework and seated herself at the window. Kate turned round at once to look at her. She had shrunk from her aunt involuntarily; not from her kiss, but from her words, which wounded her.

A strange child Kate was. If not asking questions with her lips, she was seeking solutions to problems with her eyes. She had fixed her great solemn orbs on her aunt, and they remained on her, not withdrawn for a moment, till Zerah Pepperill became uneasy, fidgeted in her seat, and said

sharply, "Am I a murderess or an atmospheric pump that you stare at me? Can't you find something else to look at?"

Kate made no reply, but averted her face. Ten minutes later, nevertheless, Zerah felt again that the eyes were on her, studying her features, her expression, noting everything about her, seeming to probe her mind and search out every thought that passed in her head.

"Really, if this is going on, I cannot stay," she said, rose and folded up the sheet she was hemming. "There's such a thing as manners. I hate to be looked at—it is as if slugs were crawling over me."

As Zerah descended, she muttered, "The girl is certainly born without a heart. I would have kissed her but that she turned from me. I wish the parson had seen that!"

The weather changed, the edge was taken off the east wind, the sun had gained power. The rooks were in excitement repairing their nests and wasting sticks about the ground under the trees, making a mess and disorder of untidiness. The labourers begged a day from their masters, that they might set their potatoes; after work hours on the farms they were busy in their gardens.

In spring the sap of health rises in young arteries as in plants, and Kate recovered, not perhaps rapidly, but nevertheless steadily. She continued to be pale, with eyes preternaturally large.

She was able to leave her chamber, and after a day or two assist in light housework.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW SCHOOLMASTER

ONE day, when her uncle was at home busy about his accounts, which engaged him frequently without greatly enlightening him, but serving rather to involve his mind in confusion, Kate was assisting her aunt in preparing for the early dinner, when a tap at the door announced a caller.

Pasco shouted to the person outside to come in, and a young man entered—tall, with fair hair, and clear, steady grey eyes.

"I am the new schoolmaster," said he frankly. "I have thought it my duty to come and see you, as you are churchwarden and one of the managers of the National School."

"Quite right; sit down. I have been busy. I am a man of the commercial world. This is our meal-time. I am disengaged from my accounts; you can sit and eat, and we will converse whilst eating."

Mrs. Pepperill entered, and her hard eye rested on the young man.

"The new schoolmaster," she said. "Do you come from these parts?"

"No; I am a stranger to this portion of England."

"That's a misfortune. If you could be born again, and in the west country, it would be a mercy for you. From where do you come?"

"From Hampshire."

"That's right up in the north."

The schoolmaster raised his eyebrows. "Of course—in the south of England."

"It doesn't follow," said Zerah; "by your speech I took you to be foreign."

"And what may your name be," said Pasco, "if I may be so bold as to ask? I have heard it, but it sounded French, and I couldn't recollect it."

"My name is very English—Walter Bramber."

"Never heard anyone so called before. Brambles, and Bramptons, and Branscombes. It don't sound English to our ears. I may as well tell you—sit down, and take a fork—that we liked our last schoolmaster uncommon much. He was just the right sort of man for us; but the rector took against him."

"I thought he was rather given to the"—

"Well, what of that? We have, all of us, our failings. A trout is an uncommon good fish, but it has bones like needles. You have your failings, my wife has hers. I will say this for Mr. Solomon Puddicombe—he never got tight in our parish. When he was out for a spree, he went elsewhere—to Newton, or Teignmouth, and sometimes to Ashburton. He couldn't help it. Some folks have fits, others have bilious attacks. When he wasn't bad, he was very good; the children liked him, the parents liked him. I

liked him, and I'm the churchwarden. He had means of his own, beside the school pence and his salary. A man has a right to spend his money as he chooses. If he had got tight on the school pence, I can understand that there might have been some kind of objection; but when it was on his private means, then I don't see that we have anything to do with it. Have you means of your own?"

"I am sorry to say—none."

"We always respect those who have means. If you have none, of course you can't go on the spree anywhere, and oughtn't to do so. It would be wrong and immoral. Take my advice, and call on the old schoolmaster. The parish will be pleased, as it has been terribly put about at the rector giving him his dismissal."

"But—I thought there had been an unhappy scandal; that, in fact, he had been committed to"—

"Well, well, he was locked up," said Pasco. "There was a cock-fight somewhere up country. Not in this country, but at a place called Waterloo."

"There is no such place in England," said Bramber. "Waterloo is in Belgium; it lies about five miles from Brussels."

"You are a schoolmaster, and ought to know. But of this I am quite sure—it was in England where he got into trouble, and the name of the place was Waterloo."

"He may have been at some inn called the Waterloo, but positively there is no place in England so designated," said Bramber.

"I know very well the place was Waterloo, and that Mr.

Solomon Puddicombe got into trouble there. We are all liable to troubles. I have lost my daughter. Troubles are sent us; the parson himself has said so. Puddicombe got locked up. You see, cock-fighting is a pursuit to which he was always very partial. You go and call on him, and he'll sing you his song. It begins—

> 'Come all you cock-fighters from far and near,
> I'll sing you a cock match when and where,
> On Aspren Moor, as I've heard say,
> A charcoal black and a bonny bonny grey.'

That is how the song begins. But it is about another cock-fight; not that at Waterloo. Cock-fighting is Mr. Puddicombe's pursuit. We have all got our pursuits, and why not? There's a man just outside Newton is wonderful hot upon flowers. His garden is a picture; he makes it blaze with various kinds of the finest coloured — foreign and English plants: that's his pursuit. Then there is a doctor at Teignmouth who goes out with a net catching butterflies, and he puts ale and treacle on the trees in the evening for catching moths: that's his pursuit. And our parson likes dabbling with a brush and some paints: that's his pursuit. And business is mine: that's my pursuit and my pleasure—and it's profit too."

"Sometimes; not often," threw in Zerah.

"Well, I don't know what your pursuits be, Mr. Schoolmaster," said Pepperill. "Let us hope they're innocent as those of Mr. Puddicombe."

The young man glanced round him, staggered at his reception, and caught the eye of Kate. She was looking

at him intently, and in her look were both interest and pity.

"We won't argue any more," said Pasco. "I suppose you can eat starigazy pie?"

"I am ashamed to say I never heard of it."

"Never heard of it? And you set to teach our children! Zerah, tell Mr. Schoolmaster what starigazy pie is."

"There is nothing to tell," said Zerah ungraciously. It was her way to be ungracious in all she said and all she did. "It is fish pie—herrings or pilchards—with their heads out of the crust looking upwards. That is what they call star-gazing in the fishes, and, in short, starigazy pie. But if you don't like it, there is our old stag coming on presently."

"Do you know, I shall have made two experiences to-day that are new to me. In the first place, I shall make acquaintance with starigazy pie, that promises to be excellent; and in the next place, I may add that it never has been my luck hitherto to taste venison."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Pepperill sharply; she thought Bramber was poking fun at her.

"I never have had the chance before of tasting venison—the meat of the rich man's table."

"No means, you know," said Pasco. "Without private means you can't expect to eat chicken."

"Our old stag is hardly chicken," said Zerah. "You see, now we've got a young stag, we didn't want the old one any more."

"Solomon Puddicombe married my second cousin,"

observed Pepperill. "Her name was Eastlake. Are you single?"

"Yes, that is my forlorn condition."

"Well, look sharp and marry into the parish. It's your only chance. You see, the farmers are all against you. They were partial to Puddicombe, and I hear he is intending to set up a private school. The farmers and better-class folk will send their children to him. They don't approve of their sons and daughters associating with the labourers' children, though they did send some to the National School so long as Solomon Puddicombe was there; but that was because he was so greatly respected."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Puddicombe is still in Coombe-in-Teignhead?"

"Certainly. When he returned from Waterloo, as the place was called where was that cock-fight, and he got into some sort of difficulty, he came back to his own house. He got it through his wife, who was an Eastlake—my cousin. It is his own now, and he has private means, so he intends setting up a school. It will be very select; only well-to-do parents' children will be admitted. When they let Mr. Puddicombe out of gaol at Waterloo, which is somewhere in the Midlands,—leastways in England,—then the people here were for ringing a peal to welcome him home. The parson put the keys in his pocket and went off. They came to me. I am churchwarden, and I knocked open the belfry door. We gave Puddicombe a peal, and the rector wasn't over-pleased. I am churchwarden, and that is something. You see, Mr. Puddicombe has means, and a house

he got through my cousin Eastlake. I don't know how the school will be kept up now that the rector has had Puddicombe turned out of it. None of the farmers will subscribe. We have no resident squire. He will have to make up your salary out of his own pocket. He is not married, so he can well afford it. If he don't consult our feelings, I don't see why we should consider his pocket. None of us wished to lose Solomon Puddicombe; everyone trusted him, and he was greatly respected."

Again the schoolmaster looked round him. A sense of helplessness had come over him. Again his eye encountered that of Kate, and he instinctively understood that this girl felt for him in his difficulties and humiliation, and understood how trying his position was.

"Now for a bit of our old stag," said Pasco.

"Stag?" exclaimed Bramber; "that is fowl!"

"What you call fowl, is stag to us. He crowed till his voice cracked. He may be tough because old, but he's been long boiling."

"Oh, a cock!" Bramber learned that day that a cock in Devonshire is entitled stag.

The meal ended, Pasco Pepperill stood up and said, "Mr. What's-your-name, I daresay you would like to look over my stores. You'll be wanting coals, and I sell coals by the bushel. You drink cider, I daresay; I can provide you with a hogshead—or half, if that will do. If you want to do shopping—I speak against my interests—but Whiteaway deals in groceries; you'll find his shop up the street. If there be anything he hasn't got, and you need to go into

Teignmouth, why, this is the ferry, and we charge a penny to put you across, and it is a penny back. If you desire to be polite to friends, and would like to entertain them, there are cockles and winkles, tea or coffee, to be had here, sixpence a head; but if the number were over twenty, we might come to an arrangement at fourpence-ha'penny. And if you desire a conveyance at any time, I have a cob and trap I let out at a shilling a mile, and something for the driver. And if you smoke and drink, I have—I mean, I daresay I could provide for you tobacco and spirits that—you know—haven't seen the Customs, and are accordingly cheap. And if you should happen to know of a timber merchant who wants a lot of oak, I've dropped over a hundred pounds on some prime stuff I shall sell only to such as know good oak from bad. And if you've any friends in the weaving trade, I do some business in wool, and am getting first-class fleeces from Dartmoor. If you can oblige me in any way like this—well, I daresay I shan't be so prejudiced for Mr. Puddicombe."

Pasco Pepperill conducted the schoolmaster about his premises in an ostentatious manner, showed him his stores, his stable, the platform on which tea and coffee, winkles and cockles were served. He named the prices he had paid, and gave the new-comer to understand that he was a man who had plenty of money at his disposal.

Then an idea occurred to Pasco. Perhaps this schoolmaster might help him with his accounts. He himself could not disentangle them and balance his books. He was shy of letting anyone else see them; but this Bramber

was a complete stranger, a man whom he could reduce to dependence on himself; he had no private means, no friends in the place; he had given the man a dinner, and might make of him a very serviceable slave.

"Look here," said Pepperill in a haughty tone, "Mr. Schoolmaster, I suppose you know something of accounts and book-keeping?"

"Certainly I do."

"I shouldn't mind now and then paying you a trifle, giving you a meal, and favouring you with my support—I am churchwarden, and consequently on the committee of the National School. Me and the bishop, and the archdeacon and rector, and Whiteaway as well. I mean, I'll stand at your back, if you will oblige me now and then, and hold your tongue."

"I will do anything I can to oblige you," said Bramber. "And as to holding my tongue, what is it you desire of me?"

"Merely to help me with my accounts. My time is so occupied, and I do business in so many ways, that my books get somewhat puzzling—I mean to a man who is taken up with business."

"I am entirely at your service."

"But—you understand—I don't want my affairs talked about. People say I have plenty of money, that I'm a man who picks it up everywhere; but I don't desire that they should know how much I have, and what my speculations are, and what they bring in."

"I can hold my tongue."

"Would you look at my books now?"

"Certainly."

Accordingly, Walter Bramber re-entered the house, and was given the books in a private sitting-room, and worked away at them for a couple of hours. The confusion was great: Pepperill might have had a genius for business, but this was not manifest in his books. Presently Pasco came in.

"Well," said he, "make 'em out, eh?"

"You must excuse my saying it," said Bramber; "but —if these are all—your affairs are in a very unsatisfactory condition."

"Unsatisfactory? oh, pshaw! Of course, I have other resources; there's the Brimpts forest of oaks. There's—oh, lots; winkles and cockles, tea and coffee not entered."

"Sixpence a head; over twenty, fourpence ha'penny," said Walter Bramber drily.

"Oh, lots—lots of other things. I haven't entered all."

"I sincerely hope it is so."

"It is so, on my word."

"Because—you seem to me to be losing seriously on every count."

"Losing? You don't know creditor from debtor account. That comes of education; it is never of use. Nothing like business for teaching a man. I don't believe in your book-learning."

"I'll come again to-morrow and go more carefully into the accounts."

"Oh, thank you, not necessary. It is clear to me you do

not understand my system—and mistake sides." Pasco became red and angry. "Look here, Mr. Schoolmaster, let me give you a word. You don't belong to the labourers—you won't be able to make friends of them. You don't belong to the gentry; there are none here—so you need not think of their society. You don't belong to the middle class—you are not a farmer, or a tradesman, or a merchant; so they will have nothing to do with you. You make my accounts all right, and the balance on the right side; give up your foolish book-keeping as learned at college, and set my accounts right by common sense, and I'll see what I can do to get you taken up by some respectable people. And, one thing more. Don't go contradicting men of property, and saying that there was no cock-fighting at Waterloo, because there was; and people don't like contradictions. When I broke open the belfry door that the ringers might give Mr. Puddicombe a peal, I let the world see I wasn't going to be priest-ridden; and we are not going to be schoolmaster-ridden neither, and told our accounts are wrong, and that Waterloo, where the cock-fight was, is not in England."

CHAPTER XI

DISCORDS

WALTER BRAMBER left Coombe Cellars greatly discouraged. He had unintentionally ruffled the plumes of the churchwarden by disputing his knowledge of the situation of Waterloo, and mainly by discovering that his affairs were in something worse than confusion, that they wore a complexion which indicated the approach of bankruptcy. And Pasco Pepperill was one of the magnates of the village, and full of consciousness that he was a great man.

Bramber walked to the little village shop belonging to Whiteaway, the second churchwarden, who was also on the committee of management, and trustee for the school under the National Society.

Here also his reception was not cordial. It was intimated to him that his presence in the village and tenure of the mastership of the school would be tolerated only on condition that he supplied himself with groceries, draperies, boots, and lollipops from Whiteaway's shop. He walked to his lodgings.

Such were the men with whom he was thrown. From

two instances he generalised. They were to be gained through their interests. Unless he got one set of things at one store and another set at another, the two mighty men who ruled Coombe-in-Teignhead would turn their faces against him, and make his residence in the place intolerable.

As he walked slowly along the little street, he encountered a cluster of children, talking and romping together, composed of boys and girls of all ages. Directly they saw him, they became silent, and stood with eyes and mouths open contemplating him. Bramber heard one boy whisper to the next—

"That's the new teacher—ain't he a duffer?"

He nodded, and addressed a few kindly words to the children; expressed his hope that they would soon be well acquainted and become fast friends. To which no response was accorded. But no sooner was he past than the whole crew burst into a loud guffaw, which set the blood rushing into the young man's face.

A moment later a stone was hurled, and hit him on the back. He turned in anger, and saw the whole pack disappear behind a cottage and down a side lane. He considered a moment whether to pursue and capture the offender, but believing that he would have great difficulty in discovering him, even if he caught the whole gang, he deemed it expedient to swallow the affront.

On reaching his lodgings, Bramber unpacked his few goods; and as he did this, his heart ached for his Hampshire home. Old associations were connected with the trifles he

took out of his box, linked with the irrevocable past, some sad, others sunny. Then he seated himself at his window and sank into a brown study.

Young, generous, he had come to this nook of the West full of enthusiasm for his task, eager to advance education, to lift the children out of the slough of ignorance and prejudice in which their fathers and forefathers had been content to live. That his efforts would meet with ready and enthusiastic support, would be gratefully hailed by parents and children alike, by rich and by poor, he had not doubted.

"There is no darkness but ignorance," said the fool in "Twelfth Night"; and who would not rejoice to be himself lifted out of shadows into light, and to see his children advanced to a higher and better walk than had been possible for himself?

But his hopes were suddenly and at once damped. He was a fish out of water. A youth with a certain amount of culture, and with a mind thirsting after knowledge, he was pitchforked into a village where culture was not valued, where the only books seen were, "The Norwood Gipsy's Dream-Book" and "The Forty Thieves," exposed in the grocer's window. He had been accustomed to associate with friends who had an interest in history, travels, politics, scenery, poetry, and art; and here in this backwater no one, so far as he could see, had interest in anything save what would fill his pocket or his paunch. Sad and temporarily discouraged, he took his violin and began to play. This instrument was to be to him in exile companion, friend, and confidant. Presently he heard a male voice downstairs

talking loudly to his landlady. He stayed his bow, and in another moment a stout and florid man stumbled up the staircase.

"How do'y, schoolmaister?" said this visitor, extending a big and moist hand. "I'm Jonas Southcott, landlord of the Lamb and Flag. As I was passing, I heard your fiddle squeak. You're just the chap us wants. Peter Adams as played first fiddle at church is dead; he was the man for you—he could turn you off a country dance, a hornpipe, or a reel."

"What, in church?"

"No, not exact-*ly* that. At our little hops at the Lamb and Flag; and on Sunday he was wonderful at an anthem or a psalm. We want someone who can take his place. You please to come and be sociable when the young folks want a dance. What can you play—'Moll in the Wad,' 'The Devil among the Tailors,' 'Oil of Barley,' 'Johnny, come tie my cravat'? These were some of Peter Adams's tunes. And on Sunday you should have heard him in Jackson's 'Tee-dum,' or at Christmas in 'While shepherds watched.' It was something worth going to church for."

"I hardly know what to say," gasped Walter Bramber. "I am but newly arrived, and have not as yet shaken into my place."

"This is practising night. The instruments will all be in my parlour this evening at half-past six. If you like to come and be sociable, and have a glass of spirits and water, and try your hand at Jackson's 'Tee-dum,' I reckon the orchestra will be uncommon gratified."

"You are very good, but"—

"And when the practice is over, we'll whip in some young folks and have a dance, and if you'll fiddle some of them tunes — 'Moll in the Wad,' or 'The Parson among the Peas,' or 'The Devil among the Tailors,' you'll get intimate with young and old alike. Then, also, you can keep your eyes open, and pick out a clean, comely maiden, and keep company with her, and walk her out on Sundays—and so look to settling among us. You have a head-wind and a strong tide against you. The old master was *such* a favourite, and so greatly respected, that I doubt, unless you make an effort, you won't go down here."

"This evening you must excuse me; I'm very tired."

"Well, this was kindly intended. I thought to put you on good terms with the parish at once. Perhaps you're shy of playing Jackson's 'Tee-dum' till you've tried it over privately. I'll see if I can borrow you the notes. Jackson's 'Tee-dum'"—

"I presume you mean the 'Te Deum.'"

"We always call it 'Tee-dum' here, and if you give it any other name, no one will understand you. We are English, not French or Chinese, in Coombe-in-Teignhead."

The landlord of the Lamb and Flag descended the stairs, and Bramber, fearing lest he should have given offence, accompanied him to the street door. His landlady was a widow. When Jonas Southcott was out of the house, she beckoned to Walter Bramber, and said—

"I be main glad you ain't going to the practice to-night, for I have axed Jane Cann in to tea."

"Who is Jane Cann?'

"Her teaches sewing and the infants in the National School. I thought you'd best become acquainted in a friendly way at the outset. She used to keep a dame s school herself, and a very good school it was. But when the parson set up the new National School, he did not want exactly to offend folk, and to take the bread out of Jane Cann's mouth,—you know she's akin to me, and to several in the place,—so he appointed her to the infants. Her's a nice respectable young woman, but her had a bit o' a misfortune as a child; falled and hurt her back, and so is rather crooked and short. Her may be a trifle older than you, but folk do say that is always best so; for when the wife is young"—

"Goodness preserve us! you don't suppose I am going to marry her because she is the sewing-mistress?"

"You might do worse. Folk are sure to talk anyhow, and it's best to give 'em some grounds for their talk. You see, she and you must walk together going to school and coming away, and she lives close by here. As I was saying, people say that when the wife is much younger than her husband there comes a long family, and the man is old and past work when some of the youngest are still no better than babies."

Bramber felt a chill down his spinal marrow, as though iced water were trickling there.

"I speak against my own interest," continued the widow, "but it does seem a pity that you should not put your salaries together and occupy one house. She gets twenty

pounds a year. If you was to marry her, you'd be twenty pounds the richer. 'Twas unfortunate, though, about that cricket ball."

"What about a cricket ball?"

"Why, Jane Cann was looking on at a cricket match among the boys, and a ball came by accident and hit her on the side of her head, so that she's hard o' hearing in her right ear. You'll please to sit by her on the left, and then she can hear well enough. Jane Cann is my cousin, and I'd like to do her a good turn, and as she's maybe about seven years older than you, you need not fear a long family."

"Preserve me!" gasped the schoolmaster.

"I'll set you a stool on her left side, and give her a high chair, then you'll be about on a level with her hearing ear."

"I—I am going out to tea," said Bramber, snatching up his hat to fly the cottage; but was arrested at the door by a burly farmer who entered.

"This is Mr. Prowse of Wonnacot," said the widow to Bramber. Then to the farmer, "This, sir, is the new teacher, who is going to lodge with me."

"I've heard of him from Southcott," said Prowse. "I've been told you play the fiddle. Perhaps you know also how to finger the pianer. My girls, Susanna and Eliza, are tremendously eager to learn the pianer, and I thought that after school hours you might drop in at my little place—Wonnacot—and give the young ladies lessons. I'd take it as a favour, and as I am a not inconsiderable subscriber to the National School, and"—

The widow, in a tone of admiration, threw in an aside to Bramber—"He subscribes half a sovereign."

The farmer inflated his chest, smiled, raised himself in his boots, and, thrusting his right hand into his pocket, rattled some money. He had heard the aside, as it was intended that he should.

"I may say," continued Mr. Prowse, "that I am a bulwark and a buttress of the National School, and as such I lay claim to the services of the teacher; and if, after hours, he can hop over to my little place and give my girls an hour three times a week, then"—he raised his chin and smiled down on the schoolmaster—"then I shall not begrudge my subscription."

"It is true," said Bramber, "that I can play a little on the piano, but—I am not sure that I am competent to give lessons. Moreover, I doubt if I shall have the time at my disposal. I am still young, and must prosecute my studies."

"If you expect to remain here in comfort," said the farmer testily, "you'll have to do what you are asked. You don't expect me to subscribe to the National School and get no advantage out of it?"

Thus it was—some made demands on the time, some on the purse, and others desired to dispose of the person of the new-comer.

To escape meeting the crooked sewing-mistress, deaf of the right ear, Walter ran into the street, and walked through the village.

A labourer came up to him.

"I want a word with you, Mr. Schoolmaister," said he.

"My boy goes to the National School, and I gives you fair warning, if you touches him with your hand or a stick, I'll have the law of you."

"But suppose he be disobedient, rude, disorderly?"

"My boy is not to be punished. He is well enough if let alone."

"But—do you send him to school to be let alone?"

"I send him to school to be out of the way when my missus is washing or doing needlework."

A little farther on his way, a woman arrested Walter Bramber, and said, "You be the new teacher, be you not? Please, I've five childer in your school and three at home. Some of the scholars bain't clean as they should be. I can't have my childer come home bringing with them what they oughtn't, and never carried to school from my house. So will'y, now, just see to 'em every day, as they be all right, afore you let 'em leave school, and I'll thank'y for it kindly."

Presently a mason returning from his work saluted Bramber.

"Look here, schoolmaister! I want you to take special pains wi' my children and get 'em on like blazes. If they don't seem to get forward in a week or two, I shall take 'em away and send them to Mr. Puddicombe, who is going to open a private school."

Then another man came up, halted, and, catching hold of the lappet of Bramber's coat, said, "My name is Tooker. I'm not a churchman, but I have several children at your school. I won't have them taught the Church Catechism.

I'm a Particular Baptist, and I won't have no childer of mine taught to say what their godfather and godmother promised and vowed for them—for they ain't had no godfathers nor godmothers, and ain't a-going to have none. You can't mistake my childer. One has got a red head, another is yaller, and the third is a sort of whitey-brown—and has sunspots, and a mole between the shoulder-blades, and the boy never had no toe-nails. So mind—no catechism for them."

"And there is something," said again another, "upon which I want to lay down what I think. I wish you to teach readin' and writin' in a rational manner."

"I hope to do that."

"Ah! but you've been too much at college, and crammed wi' book-larnin'. Why should you teach childer, and fret their little heads about the H, when it's a thing of no concern whatever. Mr. Puddicombe, he was the reasonable man. Sez he, 'Raisin puddin' is good, and duffy puddin' wi'out raisins is good—so is it with the English language—it's good all round, and the H's are just the raisins; you can put 'em in or leave 'em out as you pleases, and stick 'em in by the scores or just a sprinklin', and it's no odds—it's good anyways.' Them's the principles of spellin' I expect my little ones to larn at your school."

"And I hopes, Mr. Teacher," said another sententiously, "as you'll never forget that it is not enough to teach the children readin', writing, and 'rithmetic. There is something more"—

"There is a great deal more—geography, history, the Elements"—

"There is something above all that, and you should make it the first thing, and readin' and the rest after."

"What's that?"

"Temperance—teetotal principles."

Bramber walked on. His discouragement was becoming greater at every moment.

As he passed the Lamb and Flag, he was greeted by a hideous bray of instruments both stringed and brazen. This outburst was followed by a marvellous coruscation of instrumental music, races, leaps, a helter-skelter of fiddles, flutes, cornets, bass-viol, now together, more often running ahead or falling behind each other, then one a-pickaback on the rest.

At the door of the public-house stood Mr. Jonas Southcott with his face radiant.

"Well, Mr. Schoolmaister!" shouted he; "what do you think of this? You've never heard such moosic before, I warrant. That is what I call moosic of the spears! It's Jackson's 'Tee-dum.'"

CHAPTER XII

DAFFODILS

UNWILLING to return to his lodgings, where in vain the net was spread in his sight, Bramber walked towards Coombe Cellars. There for sixpence he could have his tea—cockles, winkles, and presumably bread and butter.

There also would he see that pale-faced girl with the large violet-blue eyes, which had been fixed on him with so much sympathy. Disappointed in proportion to the sanguineness of his expectations, Walter felt that he needed some relief from his discouragement, a word from some one who could understand him. On that day he had looked straight into many eyes, into beaming eyes, into irises that were dull with no speech in them, into stupid eyes, into boastful, into defiant, into insolent eyes.

Those of his landlady were clear as crystal, and he could see to their bottom; but what he saw there was but the agglomeration of common details of everyday life—so many loaves per week, a pint of milk, a beefsteak or mutton chop for supper, coals at so much a bushel, so much cleaning, so much washing. As in a revolving slide in a magic lantern, the same figures, the same trees, the

same houses, reappear in endless iteration; so would it be with the eyes of the landlady, week by week, year by year, till those eyes closed in death; nought else would be revealed in their shadows but loaves and milk, and coals and washing, over and over and over again. There are eyes that are stony and have no depth in them; such were those of Zerah. Others have profundity, but are treacherous; such were those of Pasco. In the two glimpses into the eyes of the pale girl, whose name he did not know, Bramber had seen depths that seemed unfathomable; wells which had their sources in the heart, deeps full of mystery and promise.

The evening might have been one in summer. A light east wind was playing; the sky was clear. The sun had been hot all day. Marsh marigolds blazed at the water brim, reflecting their golden faces in the tide. The orchards were sheeted with daffodils. The evening sky was blue shot with primrose, and every hue was mirrored in the water.

Bramber asked to have his tea out of doors on the little platform above the water, and Mrs. Pepperill bade Kate attend on the schoolmaster, and remain on the terrace so as to be ready to bring him anything he required; and, in the event of his desiring company, to be present to converse with him. She herself was engaged, and could not give him her attention.

The evening was so warm, so balmy, that it could do the convalescent no harm to sit outside the house. Kate took her needlework and planted herself on the low wall above

the water, one foot in a white stocking and neat shoe touching the gravel. She was at some distance from the schoolmaster, who opened a book and read whilst taking his tea. He did not, apparently, require her society, and she had no thought of forcing herself on him.

Yet, occasionally, unobserved by her, Bramber looked her way. Behind her was an orchard-sweep golden with daffodils, and the slant setting sun, shooting down a gap in the hills, kindled the whole multitude of flower-heads into a blaze of wavering sunfire. Kate sat, a dark figure against this luminous background, but her plum-coloured kerchief, bound round her throat and tied across her breast, was wondrous in contrast with the brilliant flowers.

Occasionally, moreover, Kate, who long looked at the flower carpet which by its radiance threw a golden light into her face, turned her head to see if the schoolmaster needed more milk or butter; and then her eyes rested on the book he held with much the same greed with which a child fastens its eyes on sweets and a miser on gold.

The setting sun had fired glass windows on the opposite side of the estuary, and it flashed in every ripple running in from the sea.

Kate wore a little bunch of celandines in her bosom, pinned into the purple kerchief. The flowers were open through the warmth of their position, and when she stooped and a streak of sunlight fell on them and filled their cups, they sent a golden sheen over her chin. The girl was looking dreamily with turned head at the sheet of blazing daffodils, drinking in the beauty of the scene, and sighing,

she knew not why, when she was startled to hear a voice at her ear, and, looking round, saw the schoolmaster.

"Are you admiring the daffodils?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Kate, too shy, too surprised to say more.

"And I," said he, "I also have been looking at them; and then I turned to familiar lines in Wordsworth, the poet I am reading. Do you know them?"

"About lent-lilies? I know nothing."

"Listen."

Then Bramber read—

"I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle in the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:—
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

Kate's dark blue eyes were fixed with intensity on the reader's face. Then they became full to overflowing.

"Why," exclaimed Bramber, "you are crying!"

"It is so true, it is so beautiful," she said, and her voice shook; and as she spoke the tears ran down her white cheeks. "How did he who wrote that know about my illness, and that I was thinking about, and troubled about, the daffodils when I was in my fever? It is all true"; she put her hands to her bosom; "I feel it—I cannot bear it."

Walter Bramber paused in surprise. He was himself a passionate lover of nature, of flowers, and he was fond of the words of the poet of nature—words that touched deep chords in his spirit. But here was a pale, reserved girl, to whom the words of the poet appealed with even greater force than to himself.

"Are you fond of poetry?" he asked.

She hesitated, and slightly coloured before answering.

"I do not know. Father sings a song or two. There are words, they rhyme, and they are set to a tune, and sometimes a good tune helps along bad words; but I never before heard words that had the music in themselves and wanted nothing to carry them along as on the wings of a bird. When you read that to me, it was just as though I heard what I had felt in my heart over and over again, and had never found how I could put it."

"Do you know why these flowers are called daffodils?"

She turned her solemn eyes on him again.

"Because they are daffodils; why else?"

"I suppose," said Bramber, "when the Normans came to England, they brought these yellow flowers with them, and with the flowers the name by which they had known them in Normandy—*Fleurs d'Avril*, which means April flowers."

"They do come in April, but also in March, and this year the weather has been warm, and everything is advanced."

"So," continued Bramber, "when the English tried to pronounce the French name, *Fleurs d'Avril*, they made daverils, and then slid away into further difference, and settled down on daffodils. Do you know about the Conquest by the Normans?"

Kate shook her head sadly.

"I know nothing—nothing at all." Then, after a pause, she asked timidly, "Will you be very good and kind, and repeat those verses, and let me learn them by heart? Oh," she gasped, and expanded, and clasped her hands, "it would be such a joy to me! and I could repeat them for ever and ever, and be happy."

"I shall be delighted."

Kate planted herself on one of the benches by the table, leaned her chin in her hands, and listened to each line of the poem with concentrated attention. One or two words she did not understand, and Bramber explained their meaning to her. When the piece had been read over slowly, she said—

"May I try? Do you mind? I think I know it."

Then she recited the poem with perfect accuracy.

"You are quick at learning," said Bramber. "I hope I may find my pupils in the National School as eager to acquire and as ready to apprehend."

"I never heard words like these before," said Kate. "May I tell you what they are like to me?"

"Certainly."

"They are like lightning on a still night, without rain, without thunder. The heavens are open and there is light —that is all. Is there more in that book?"

"A great deal," answered the young man; and, pointing to the celandines in Kate's bosom, said, "The poet has something to say about these flowers."

"What, buttercups?"

"They are not buttercups. Take them out from where they are pinned. I will teach you a lesson—how to distinguish sorts."

As the girl removed the bunch and placed it on the table, he said, "Do you see the petals? The golden leaves of the flower are called petals. They are pointed. Now, remember, a buttercup has rounded petals."

"You are right, and they come out later. They are more like little drunkards."

"Drunkards? What do you mean?"

"The large golden cups that grow by the water's edge— these we call drunkards, but they drink only water."

"You mean the marsh marigold."

"Perhaps so, but it is very different from the marigold of the garden. The leaves"—

Bramber laughed. "Now you are going to teach me to

distinguish. You are quite right—that water-drinker is not a marigold at all. But country people give it that name because it is the great golden flower that blooms at or about Lady Day, and the lady is the Virgin Mary. Now consider. The celandine has sharply-pointed petals. Do you see the difference between them and those of the golden water-drinker?"

"I see this clearly now."

"He who wrote those verses about the daffodils has written three poems on the celandine."

"What! on these little flowers?"

Kate coloured with delight and surprise.

"Yes, and very beautiful they are. I will reserve them for another day. You have enough to think about in the lines on the daffodils."

"How did the man who wrote them know of my illness, and how I dreamed and troubled about the daffodils?"

"He knew nothing of you."

"He must have done so. He says he was lonely as a cloud, and I am Kitty Alone."

"Is that your name?"

"They call me so because I have no companions and no friends, and because"— She checked herself and hung her head.

"But you have relatives."

"Yes—my father and Aunt Zerah. But for all that I am alone. They are grown big and old, and so of course cannot understand me—a child. And at school I didn't

have friends. Then the man must have been here, for he says—

> 'Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
> Fluttering and dancing in the breeze
>
> Continuous as the stars that shine
> And twinkle in the Milky Way,
> They stretched in never-ending line
> Along the margin of a bay.'

There they are—'in never-ending line.'"

"There are daffodils elsewhere, as there are solitary spirits elsewhere than in this little being"—and Walter lightly touched the girl's brow.

Both were silent for a minute. Presently Kate said, "When I was looking at the daffodils, as the sun was on them, they blazed in at my eyes and I was full of light, and now those beautiful words are like the sun on the flowers that I shall carry away with me, and as I lie in bed in the dark I shall think of them, and the golden light will fill my room and fill my heart—

> 'Flashing upon that inward eye,
> Which is the bliss of solitude.'

That is true of the inward eye. You can see more with that than with the real eye. The man was a prophet. He knew and wrote of things that are not known or are not talked about in the world."

"So they call you Kitty Alone. You did not give me the second reason. What is that reason?"

The girl looked embarrassed.

"You will laugh at me."

"Indeed I will not," answered Bramber earnestly.

She still hesitated.

"You fear me? Surely you can trust me."

"You are so good—indeed I can. You speak to me as does no one else, and that is just why I do not wish to appear ridiculous in your eyes."

"That you never will."

Then she said, blushing and hanging her head, "It is all along of a song my father sings."

"What song is that?"

"It is some silly nonsense about a frog that lived in a well—and the burden is—'Kitty Alone'—and then 'Kitty Alone and I.'"

"Sing me the words."

She did as requested.

"The air is pleasant and very quaint. It deserves better words. Will you remain here whilst I run for my violin?"

"Yes, unless my aunt calls me within."

Walter Bramber hastened to his lodgings, and brought away his cherished instrument. He made the girl sing over a few verses of the song, and then struck in with the violin.

He speedily caught the melody, and played it, then went off into variations, returning anon to the pleasant theme, and Kate listened in surprise and admiration. Never before had she thought that there was much of air, or of grace and delicacy in the tune as sung by her father, and cast jeeringly at her in scraps by the youths of Coombe-in-Teignhead. Zerah looked out at the door and summoned her niece.

Kate started as from a dream.

"My bunch of flowers," she said.

Bramber had secured the celandines.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY

KATE entered the house, at the summons of her aunt, and found that John Pooke was within, standing with his hat in his hand, in front of him, twirling it about and playing with the string that served to contract the lining band.

"I am so glad to see that you are well, Kitty."

Kate thanked him. She was not a little vexed at being called away from conversation with the schoolmaster, whose talk was so unlike that of any other man she had met. The rector she knew and loved, but she was before him as a scholar to be instructed in spiritual concerns, and their conversation never turned on such matters as had been mooted between her and the schoolmaster. For a little while she had been translated into a new sphere, and had heard words of another order to those that had hitherto met her ears. Now she was brought back into the world of commonplace, and could not at once recover herself and accommodate herself to it. This made her shy and silent. Pooke also was shy, but he was awkward to boot.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Kate?" he asked in suppliant tone.

"Indeed, I thank you many times, Jan, for inquiring about me when I was ill. Now, as you see, I am myself again."

"I was the cause of your illness."

"No indeed, no blame attaches to you. We will not talk of blame—there is none."

"Are you going to Ashburton Fair on Tuesday?"

"I do not know."

"Yes, you do," threw in Aunt Zerah; then to John Pooke, "She is going to the moor to her father for a change. It is her father's wish, so that she may be soon strong again. He will meet her at Ashburton at the fair, if we can get her so far."

"I am going to the fair," said Pooke eagerly. "That is to say, sister Sue and I be going together there. The young man to whom she is about to be married lives at Ashburton, and will have it that she goes. There is room for a third in our trap. I should so much like to take you —I mean, sister Sue would wish it, if you would favour me —I mean sister Sue."

"Thank you again, Jan, for another kindness," said the girl, "but I shall be driven to Ashburton by my uncle. I really had not considered that the fair was on Tuesday."

"Your uncle can spare you," thrust in Zerah; "and if Jan Pooke is so civil as to invite you to go in his conveyance, it is only proper you should accept."

"But, aunt," said Kate, slightly colouring, "my father has settled that I am to go with Uncle Pasco, and I do not like"—

"Oh, so long as you are got to Ashburton, it doesn't matter who takes you," interrupted Zerah.

"If it does not matter," said Kate, "then let me hold to my father's arrangement."

"That is not kind to me—I mean to sister Sue," said Pooke dolefully.

"I intend no unkindness," answered the girl, "but when my father has made a plan, I do not like to break it even in little matters."

The young man twirled his hat about, and pulled out the string from the band. He paused, looked ashamed, and said, "You don't choose to go with me, that is the long and the short of it. Your aunt will excuse you from going with Pasco Pepperill."

"Do not tease me, Jan," pleaded Kate, confused and unhappy. She was well aware that there had been village talk about her having been in the boat with Jan, that her aunt was desirous of thrusting her upon him. With maidenly reserve she shrank from his proposal, lest by riding in the trap with him some colour might be given to the suspicions entertained in the village, and some food should be supplied to the gossips.

The lad went to the window, and looked out on the little platform with moody eyes.

"Why," said he, "there is that new schoolmaster there." He stood watching him. "He's a noodle. What do'y think he is about? He has got three or four faded buttercups, and he is putting them between the leaves of his note-book, just as though there was something wonderful

in them; just as if they were the rarest flowers in the world. I always thought he was a fool—now I know it."

Kate winced.

"I say," pursued Jan, "have you heard about him and Jackson's 'Tee-dum'? The landlord went to him civil-like, and invited him to join the choir. He bragged about his violin as if he could play finer than anyone hereabouts. But when the landlord told him our chaps could play Jackson's 'Tee-dum,' he ran away. I reckon Jackson's 'Tee-dum' is a piece to find out the corners of a man. He daren't face it. Kitty, if you won't come with me to the fair, I swear I'll offer the odd seat to Rose Ash."

Then he left the house.

Kate attempted to fly, for she knew what was coming, but was arrested by her aunt, who grasped her by the shoulders.

"You little fool!" she said. "Don't you see what may come of this if you manage well, or let me manage for you? Jan Tottle came here every day to inquire when you were ill, and now you let him slip between your fingers and into the hands of that designing Rose. He is a ball that has come to you, and you toss it to her. Don't think she is fool enough to toss him back to you. When she has him she will close her fingers on him. What is going to become of you, I'd like to know, that you should act like this? Do not reckon on anything your father will bring you; or on your uncle either. One is helping the other down the road to ruin, and we may all be nearer the poorhouse than you imagine."

She let go her hand, for Bramber came in, and asked what he had to pay.

"Sixpence," answered Zerah, "and what you like to the little maid. I reckon she'll take a ha'penny."

Kate's head fell, covered with shame, and she thrust her hands behind her back.

Walter paid Mrs. Pepperill, and said, without looking at Kate, "The little maid and I understand each other, and the account between us is settled."

"Now look here," said Zerah, allowing her niece to escape, and laying hold of the young man, "I want a word with you, Mr. Schoolmaster. My husband has let you go through his accounts. I reckon he'd got that muddled himself, he didn't know his way out, and thought you'd have led him, as well as Jack-o'-lantern leads out of a bog. The light is good enough, but when the mire is there, what can the light do but show it? It can't dry it up. If it weren't for the cockles and coffee as I get a few sixpences by, I reckon we'd have been stogged (mired) long ago. But Pasco, he has the idea that he's a man of business and can manage a thousand affairs, and as ill-luck will have it, that brother o' mine feeds his fancies wi' fresh meat. Now I want you to tell me exactly what you found in his books."

"I am not justified in speaking of Mr. Pepperill's private affairs."

"What! not to his wife?"

"Not to anyone. I was taken into confidence."

"Bless you! he couldn't help himself. Set a man as don't know nothing about machinery to manage an engine,

and he'll get it all to pieces in no time. Pasco knows nothing about business, and there he is trying to run coal stores, wool, timber—all kinds o' things. I know what it will come to, though you keep mum."

To escape further questioning, Bramber left Coombe Cellars, and walked towards the village.

The school was closed for a week. Some painting and plastering had to be done in it before he could begin his duties. It was as well, he thought; it allowed him time to find his bearings, to get to understand something of the people amongst whom he was to be settled, and whose children he was to instruct.

As Bramber walked in the dusk, he encountered the rector, Mr. Fielding, who stopped him.

"Are you going indoors?" asked the parson; "or have you leisure and inclination for a stroll?"

"You do me an honour, sir; I shall be proud."

"Let us walk by the water-side. This is a beautiful hour—neither night nor day—something of one, something of the other, like life. And who can say of the twilight in which he walks whether it will broaden into perfect day or deepen into utter night."

The rector took the young man's arm.

Mr. Fielding belonged to a type that has completely disappeared; peculiar to its time and necessarily transitory. He belonged to that school of Churchmen which had been founded by Newman and Keble; of men cultured, scholarly, refined in thought, steeped in idealism, unconsciously affected, aiming at what was impossible,—at least,

fully to achieve,—and not knowing practicable methods, not able to distinguish proportion in what they sought after, ready to contend to death equally for trifles as for principles.

Mr. Fielding wore tall white collars and a white tie, a black dress coat and open black waistcoat. His hat was usually at the back of his head, and he walked with his head bent forwards and his shoulder against the wall—a trick caught and copied from Newman, caught when first under his influence, and now unconsciously followed.

Mr. Fielding was unmarried, a quiet, studious man, courteous to all, understood by none.

They walked together a little way, and talked on desultory matters. Then Walter Bramber asked the rector, "Would you mind telling me, sir, where my predecessor got into trouble? Mr. Pepperill says it was at Waterloo."

"Waterloo? dear me, no; it was at Wellington."

"I knew it could not be at Waterloo, but he insisted on it, and that it was in England."

"There was, you see, a connection of ideas. There is always that, in the worst blunders. Did you correct him?"

"Yes; I said Waterloo was not in England."

"You should have let it pass, till you knew how to enlighten him as to where the place really was. Never show a man he is wrong till you can show him how he can be right. Also, never let a man see you are pulling him out of a ditch, always let him think he is scrambling out of it himself. A man's self-respect is his best governing motive, and should not be wounded."

They paced along together a little way.

"You are a young man," said the rector, "and a young man is sanguine." He paused, and walked on without saying anything for a minute, then he added, "I was sanguine once. That arises from confidence in one's self, and confidence in one's cause, and confidence in mankind. You have a noble cause—the priest and the schoolmaster have the greatest of missions: to educate what is highest in man, spirit and intellect. You have no reason to be shaken by any doubt, to feel any hesitation in adhesion to the cause of education. 'Let there be light!' was the first word God spake. There is the keynote of creation, the moral law laid down for the whole intelligent world. We walk in the twilight that we know is brightening into day."

He paused again; then after a dozen paces he proceeded, "You have confidence in yourself. You have enthusiasm, you have ability, you know what you have to teach, and you long to impart to others what you value yourself. Is it not so?"

"It is so indeed."

"Discouragement will come, and it is my duty to prepare you for it. You have confidence in human nature. You think all will be as eager to drink in instruction as you are eager to dispense it. You may be mistaken, and will be disappointed. It has taken me some years, Mr. Bramber, to learn a fact which I will communicate to you, as a caution against losing heart. You will remember that when the sower went forth to sow, though all his seed was

good, yet only one-fourth part came to anything. We must work for the work's sake, and not for results. In your patience possess ye your souls. That is one of the hardest of lessons to acquire."

"I will try not to expect too much."

"Expect nothing. Look to the work, and the work only. One sows, another reaps, a third grinds, a fourth bakes, but it is the fifth who eats the loaf and tastes how good it is. Did you ever hear what Mme. de Maintenon said of the carps, that had been transferred to the marble basins of Marly, in which they died? 'Ah!' said she, 'they are like me, they regret their native mud.' You will find that your pupils do not want to be translated to purer fountains, that in them there is a hankering after their native ignorance. That there will be little receptiveness, no enthusiasm after the light, no hunger after the bread of the Spirit—that is what you must be prepared to find. I have found it so, and am now content with the smallest achievements—to make them take a few crumbs from my palm, to accept the tiniest ray let into their clouded minds. Be content to do your work, and do not be asking for results. Do your duty, leave results to another day and to the reapers. You and I are the humble sowers, enough for us to know that, but for us, there would be no golden harvest which we shall not see."

The rector withdrew his hand from the arm of Bramber.

"There is a saying, 'Except ye be as little children'—You know the rest. What does that mean? Not the simplicity of children—simplicity springs out of inexperi-

ence; not the innocence—which arises from ignorance—but the inquisitiveness of the child, which is its characteristic. The child asks questions, it wants to know everything, often asking what it is inconvenient to answer. Mr. Bramber, unless we have this spirit of inquiry, we cannot enter into any kingdom above that of animal life. There is the intellectual kingdom, and when there is eagerness to know, then there is advance into that realm, and you will be the great prophet and mystagogue who will lead the young of this village into that kingdom. Then, secondly, there is the spiritual kingdom, but of that I will not now speak. I hope you will find some pupils apt to learn, but the many will, I fear, be listless."

"A single swallow does not make a summer," said the schoolmaster; "but I have already met with one here who verily hungers and thirsts after knowledge."

"Ah!" Mr. Fielding looked round, and his face lightened. "You have met—talked to Kitty."

"Yes, sir; she is full of eagerness."

"Oh that we had many other minds as active! Alas! alas! I fear in that she is, as they call her, Kitty Alone."

CHAPTER XIV

TO THE FAIR

"HEIGH! schoolmaister!" Pasco Pepperill shouted from his tax-cart to Walter Bramber, who was walking along the road collecting wild-flowers—the earliest of the year—that showed in a sheltered hedge.

In the trap with Pasco was Kate.

"I say, schoolmaister," said Pepperill, reining in his grey cob, "be you inclined for a drive? I'm off to Ashburton Fair, where I may have business. You have not yet seen much of our country. Jump up! She"—he indicated Kate with a jerk of his chin—"she can squat behind."

The day was lovely, the prospect of a drive engaging; but Bramber hesitated about dislodging Kate, who had, however, immediately begun to transfer herself from the seat beside her uncle to the place behind.

"That is not fair nor right," said the young man. "Let her keep her place, and let me accommodate myself in the rear."

"Not a bit! not a bit!" exclaimed Pepperill. "I've asked you for company's sake."

"But you have the best company in your niece."

"She!"—Pasco uttered a contemptuous sniff,—"she is no company. She either sits as a log or pesters one with questions. What do you think she has just asked of me?" Imitating Kate's voice, he said, "Uncle, why have horses so many hairs in their ears? Why the dowse does it matter whether horses have hair in their ears or not? Now, schoolmaister, get up in front."

Bramber still objected.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Pasco; "I'm taking you up so as to be freed from these questions. It is catechising, or nothing at all."

Bramber looked uneasily at Kate's face, but her countenance was unmoved; she was accustomed to contemptuous treatment. She raised her timid eyes to Walter, and he said hastily, with some earnestness—

"You and I, Mr. Pepperill, form very different opinions of what entertainment is. When I was having tea at your house, she and I had plenty to say to each other. I found her full of interest"—

"In what?" sneered the uncle.

"Daffodils."

"Oh, daffodils!" he laughed. "Any ass likes daffodils."

"Pardon me," answered Bramber warmly; "the ass and animals of like nature reject or pass them by unnoticed."

"Well, I care not. Get up if you are coming with me. I'll show you a better sight than daffodils, and something worthier of conversation."

Pasco took up the schoolmaster, not solely for his own entertainment, but because he was somewhat uneasy at

having let him into the secrets of his affairs. In his perplexity and inability to balance his accounts, he had grasped at the chance offered by the advent of Bramber; but now he feared he had been too confiding, and that the young man might blab what he had seen. It was requisite, or advisable, that he should disabuse his mind of any unfavourable impression that might have been received from the perusal of his accounts; and, like a stupid, conceited man, he thought that he could best effect this by ostentation and boastfulness.

In his pride, Pepperill would not admit that his circumstances were involved, though an uneasy feeling lay as a sediment at the bottom of his heart, assuring him that there was trouble in store.

"Why do horses have hair in their ears?" said Bramber on taking his seat, turning to the girl in the back of the carriage. "I will tell you why. If a cockchafer or an earwig were to get into your little pink shell, in a minute up would go the finger in protection of the organ, and to relieve you of the intruder. A horse cannot put up his hoof to clear his ear, therefore he is provided with a natural strainer, which will guard him from being irritated, and perhaps injured, by anything penetrating where it should not."

"Thank you," said Kate. "There is a reason for everything."

"You don't happen to know anything about business?" asked Pepperill, impatient to engross the conversation. "I mean—commercial business."

"My mother kept a shop—in quite a small way."

"Ah! in *quite* a small way. I don't mean anything in a *small* way," said Pasco, swelling. "I refer to buying in gross and retailing coal, wool, hides, bark, timber. That's my line. I do nothing myself in a small way—still, I can understand there are people who do."

Pasco nodded to right and left as he drove along, in return to salutations he received from men driving cattle, from farmers ambling on their cobs.

"You observe," said Pepperill, "I'm pretty well known and respected."

Presently he drew up at a wayside inn.

"I like to step into these publics," said he apologetically; "not that I'm a man as takes nips—but one meets one's fellows; it is all in the way of business; one hears of bargains. There is more dealing done over a tavern table than in a market-place. I'll be with you shortly—unless you will join me in a glass inside. Kitty will mind the cob."

"Thank you; I will await you here, and keep Kitty company."

"Ah, you will never be popular as was Puddicombe, unless you take your glass!"

Then Pepperill entered the house.

Bramber turned in his seat, and met Kate's earnest blue eyes. There was question in them.

"Now," said he, "I know your head is full of notes of interrogation."

"I do not understand you."

"Your uncle and others do not like to be questioned.

I am a schoolmaster. I delight in answering questions and communicating information. Put to me any queries you like, and as many as you like, and I will do my best to satisfy you."

"Why do some stars twinkle and others do not?" asked Kate at once. This difficulty had been troubling her mind ever since the night in the boat.

"Planets do not twinkle."

"What are planets?"

"Worlds on high. Stars that flash are suns that illumine worlds. They glitter with their own light; planets shine with borrowed, reflected light."

"The planets are worlds?"

"Yes."

"Very tiny ones?"

"Not at all. Some are far larger than our globe. They circle round our sun."

Kate looked the young man steadily in the face. The thought was too great, too awful, to be received at once. She supposed he was joking. But his countenance was an assurance to her that he spoke the truth.

"Oh," said she, with a long breath, "what it is to know!"

"There is no higher pleasure."

"Nothing gives me greater joy than to learn."

"But did you not get taught such simple truths as this in school?" asked Bramber.

"Mr. Puddicombe did not tell us much," answered Kate. "We learned our letters and to cypher—nothing more."

"I am glad you can read," said Bramber.

"I can read, but I have no books. It is like having thirst and no water. I have learned how to walk, but may not use my feet. I am always like one who is hungry; I want to know about this, and about that, and I get no answer. Why are there tides? Why are some higher than others? What becomes of the stars by day?"

"The matter of the tides is beyond you. The stars are in the sky still, but, owing to the blaze of the sun by day, you cannot discern their lesser glories. If, however, you were at the bottom of a well, you would be able, on looking up, to see the stars, pale, indeed, but distinctly visible, in the heavens."

"I should love to go down a well, and see that with my own eyes."

"I wish—oh, I wish you were coming to school!"

Kate heaved a sigh.

"But as you cannot come to me," said Walter, "I shall have to come to you."

Kate shook her head. "That means sixpence a time in cockles and tea. It would ruin you."

"Well, I will lend you books."

"Mr. Fielding once did that, but Aunt Zerah was angry, and sent them back to the Rectory. She said that she did not want me to be a scholar, and have all kinds of book nonsense put into my head. I was to be a maid-of-all-work."

Bramber did not speak. He was very sorry for the girl, craving for knowledge, gasping for the very air in which her

spirit could live—and denied it. Then he said, pointing to the board above the inn-door—

"Do you notice the tavern sign, Kitty?"

"Yes—'The Rising Sun.'"

"Recently repainted and gilt. Now, I will repeat to you the lines I withheld the other day concerning the celandine; that is to say, such as I remember:

> 'I have not a doubt but he
> Whosoe'er the man might be,
> Who, the first, with painted rays,
> (Workman worthy to be sainted,)
> Set the signboard in a blaze,
> When the risen sun he painted,
> Took the fancy from a glance
> At thy glittering countenance.'"

Then a rattle of wheels and a tramp of horse's hoofs. A dogcart was approaching rapidly. As it came near, the driver reined in and drew up alongside.

Kate recognised John Pooke, with Rose Ash at his side; behind, clinging uncomfortably to the back rail, was Susan Pooke. The young man flourished his whip and saluted Kate joyously.

"We shall meet at the fair. I shall await you, Kitty."

Then he lashed the horse, and whirled away. Kate saw Rose's face turned towards her, wearing a dissatisfied frown.

"Who are those?" asked Walter, with a little twinge of displeasure in his heart.

"The young man is Jan Pooke, he whose rick was burned; and with him is Rose Ash, the prettiest girl in all

Coombe. Jan's father has the orchard in which are the daffodils. It belonged to uncle. Uncle had a bit of farm, but he gave it up—sold it—to devote himself more to business. Behind, in the dogcart, is Susan Pooke. She is going to be married at Easter to someone in Ashburton."

Then, wiping his lips and buttoning his pockets, Pasco came from the tavern. He mounted to his place and resumed the reins and whip.

"Well," said he, "got some talk out of the girl?—foolery —rank foolery, I'll swear. Never heard her say anything sensible; but you and I will have a good conversation as we drive along. We will talk about bullocks."

CHAPTER XV

A REASON FOR EVERYTHING

WALTER BRAMBER sprang from his seat beside Pasco, on the latter drawing up outside the inn at Ashburton, and ran to the back of the tax-cart that he might assist Kate to descend. There was no step at the back. He held up his arms to receive her; she was standing preparing to spring.

As he looked up, he exclaimed, "They are planets!"

"What are planets?"

"Those blue orbs—their light is so still and true."

Then he caught her as she sprang, glad to cover her confusion. A compliment was something to which Kate was wholly unaccustomed, and one startled and shamed her.

"Now, whither?" he asked.

"To my father."

"But where is he?"

"I do not know."

"Come, come!" said Pepperill, who had consigned the reins to the ostler. "I want you, schoolmaster; I cannot let you go fairing yet. I have business on my hands and

desire your presence. Afterwards, if you will, and when we have got rid of Kate, I'll find you some one more agreeable with whom you can go and see the shows."

"But, in the meanwhile, who is to take care of her?" asked Bramber.

"I will do that," said John Pooke, who came up, elbowing his way through the crowd. "Here are several of us Coombe-in-Teignhead folk: there is sister Sue, but she is off with her sweetheart; and here is Rose Ash, and here is Noah Flood."

There was no help for it; much to his disappointment. Bramber had to relinquish Kate, and accompany her uncle into the market.

Kate hesitated about going with John Pooke, but knew not what else to do. Her uncle shook her off, concerned himself no more about her, and carried the schoolmaster with him. Alone she was afraid to remain. A shy girl, unwont to be in a crowd; the noise of the fair, the shouts of chapmen, the objurgations of drovers sending their cattle through the thronged street, the braying of horns and beating of drums outside the shows, the hum of many voices, the incessant shifting of groups, combined to bewilder and alarm her. But she did not like to attach herself to Jan Pooke's party. Tongues had already been set a-wagging relative to herself and the young man. The adventure in the boat, followed up by his solicitude during her illness, had attracted attention in the village, and had become a topic of conversation and speculation.

Rose Ash, as was well known, had set her mind on

winning John; she was a handsome girl, of suitable age and position, the miller's daughter. Everyone had said that they would make a pair. Jan, in his amiable, easy-going way, had offered no resistance; he had, perhaps, been a little proud of being considered the lover of the prettiest girl in the district; he had made no advances himself, but had submitted to hers with mild complacency, taking care not to compromise himself irrevocably.

Since John had been associated with Kate in that adventure on the mud-bank, he had been less cordial to Rose, had kept out of her way, and avoided being left alone with her. Rose was ready-witted enough to see that a spoke had been put into her wheel, and to discover how that spoke had been inserted. She felt jealous of, and resentful towards Kate, and lost no occasion of hinting ill-natured things, and throwing out wounding remarks both to Kate's face and behind her back. Kate had every reason to shrink from joining this party, sure that it would lead to vexation. But she had no choice.

"Come along, Kate," said John; "sister Sue and I and the rest are ready. What do you wish?"

"I think I might be consulted," said Rose sullenly.

"I know your wishes already—you want to go into the fair," replied Jan, turning to the pouting girl.

"And if she wishes to be out of it,—in the mud, for instance,—are we all to be dragged in with her?" asked Rose.

"Tell me, Kitty, what do you desire?"

"I would like to find my father."

"Where is he? do you know? We will go through the fair and look for him."

Kate held back. John came after her and said, "If we cannot find your father at once, where would you like to go?"

Half laughing and half crying, the girl answered, "I should like to be at the bottom of a well; Mr. Bramber says that there one could see the stars, even in broad daylight."

"By all means, put her there and leave her there; we are well content," said Rose, who had followed and overheard what was said.

"There is no well in Ashburton," said Jan, taking Kate's arm. "There are better things to be seen than stars by daylight. Come, we will seek your father. I will be sworn we shall light on him."

Kate withdrew from the young man's hold, but nevertheless allowed herself to accompany the little party that now moved in the direction of the fair. The girl was unaccustomed to be in a crowd. Neither her father nor her uncle had concerned himself to give her diversion, to take her out of the monotony and solitude of her life in Coombe Cellars. A country fair presented to her all the attractions of novelty, at the same time that the noise and movement alarmed her. Susan Pooke's intended husband had hooked her on to his arm, and the two, sufficient to each other, separated from the rest and took their own way among the booths. Kate was therefore left with Rose, John Pooke, and Noah Flood.

Noah was an acquaintance rather than a friend of John, and a cousin of Rose. Jan did not discourage him. Noah was one of Rose's many admirers; a hopeless one hitherto, as he felt his inability to compete with Pooke. Now, Jan was glad of his presence as likely to relieve him of Rose; and that girl was also content to have him by, hoping that by showing him some favour she might rouse the jealousy of the torpid Jan. The little company, in which prevailed such discordant elements, moved along the street to the market-place. Every neighbouring parish had sent in a contingent of farmers to buy and sell, of young folks to gape and amuse themselves, of servants who sought masters and mistresses, of employers in quest of servants. All elbowed, pushed their way along, met friends, laughed, shouted, made merry. Presently Jan arrested his party at a stall on which numerous articles attractive to the female heart were exposed for sale.

"Now, Kate," said he, "I have long owed you something, and a fairing you expect as your due."

"It is I who have a right to it," said Rose hastily. "You brought me to the fair. That is fine manners for a lad to bring a girl, desert her, and give his fairing to another."

"I am going to make presents to both of you," replied Jan, colouring. "I invited Kitty before I asked you."

"Oh, indeed?" Rose flared up. "I am to come second-best after that frog, unfortunately, against her wishes, not now in a well. I refuse your presents. I will take what Noah will give me."

"Do not be angry, Rose," said Jan. "Kitty, you see, has no one with her. Her uncle and that schoolmaster fellow have deserted her. As for a fairing—I owe it her. It was all along of me that"—

"I know," scoffed Rose. "She ran you on a mud-bank. It was done on purpose. A designing hussy."

"For shame!" said Jan.

"No respectable girl would have done it I know what folks say"—

Jan boiled up. "You are a spiteful cat, Rose. I will not give you anything. Kate, what would you like to have? Choose anything on this stall; it is yours."

"I do not wish for anything," answered the girl timidly. Yet her eyes had ranged longingly among the treasures exposed.

"You shall have some present from me," persisted Pooke. "Here, a dark blue silk handkerchief—the colour of your eyes."

"I am going to have that," exclaimed Rose. "Noah was about to take it up when you spoke. It is mine."

"There are two, I'll be bound," said Jan.

"No, there are not. Get her a yellow one—the blue is mine." Rose snatched at it.

There actually was no second of the same colour.

"Yellow becomes you best," said Jan angrily; "you are so jealous and spiteful."

"Jealous? of whom?"

"Of Kate."

"I!—I!" jeered the handsome, spoiled girl, with an out-

burst of laughter. "I jealous of that creature. Cockles and winkles picked off a mud-bank!"

"Give up that handkerchief," exclaimed Jan passionately.

"I really will not have it. I assure you I will not. Take it," pleaded Kate, "I have no right to accept any present."

"Nonsense," said Pooke. "I invited you to the fair, and here you are with me. I must and I will give you something by which to remember me."

He stepped back and pushed his way through the crowd to another stall. Kate remained where she was with fluttering heart, averting her burning face from the eyes of Rose, and looking eagerly among the throng for her uncle or father.

Presently Jan returned.

"There," said he, "now I have something more worthy of you: a really good and handsome workbox."

He held out a polished box with mother-of-pearl shield on the lid, and scutcheon for the keyhole.

"Look at it!" he said, and, raising the lid, displayed blue silk lined and padded compartments, stocked with thimble, scissors, reels, pins, needles, bodkin, and a tray. "Look!" exclaimed Jan, his cheeks glowing with mingled anger and pleasure; "underneath a place where you can put letters—anything; and you can lock the whole up. There, it is yours."

Kate was shy about accepting so handsome a gift, yet could not refuse it. The workbox had been bought and paid for. It was the custom for a young man to give a

damsel a present at the fair, but then, to do so was tantamount to declaring that he had chosen her as his sweetheart. With thanks, more in her eyes than on her lips, Kate accepted the offering, and took it under her arm. Rose had turned away her head with a toss of the chin, and had pretended not to have seen the transaction.

"Let us move on," urged Pooke; "there is a shooting-place beyond, and, by George! I'll have a try for nuts and fill your pockets, Kate."

Noah and Rose had already drifted from the booth at which the altercation had taken place. The girl had knotted the blue silk kerchief about her throat in defiance; her cheeks were flaming, her eyes glistening, and her mouth quivering. She pretended to be devoted to Noah, who was vastly elated, but her eyes ever and anon stealthily returned to Jan and Kate.

A large tray full of hazel nuts stood before a battered target, and on the nuts lay a couple of guns.

"Now then! a penny a shot! only one penny!" yelled the proprietor; and his wife dipped a tin half-pint measure into the nuts, shook it, poured them out and echoed, "Only one penny. Half a pint in the red, a pint in the gold! Only one penny. A dozen nuts for the white. Only one penny."

"I'll have a shy," said Noah, laid down his coin and fired. He struck the white, and received a dozen nuts.

"I'll do better than that!" shouted Jan, and took the gun from Flood's hand, threw down threepence, and said,

"I'll have three shots and stuff my pockets." He fired—and missed.

"By George!" Jan looked astonished. "I always considered myself a crack shot."

He fired again and hit the black. The woman offered him half a dozen nuts.

"I won't have 'em—I'll clear the stall presently."

He aimed carefully and missed again.

Then Kate touched him on the arm and said, "Do you not see all your shots have gone one way—to the right, low down. Aim at the right-hand corner to the left, just outside the black."

"You try," said Jan, and threw down a penny with one hand and passed the gun to Kate with the other.

The girl aimed, and put her arrow into the bull's-eye.

She handed back the gun, saying to Pooke, "The barrel is crooked, that is why your shot went wrong."

"Try again, Kitty."

She shook her head.

"Well," said Jan, "I'll follow your directions."

He fired, and his shot flew into space beyond the target.

"There!" he exclaimed reproachfully, turning to the girl.

"The woman changed the gun," said Kate. "Now aim at the centre, and I will soon tell you what is wrong."

He did as she directed, and his shot went into the outer green.

"I see," said Kate; "this barrel is given a twist in another way. Now look where your arrow strikes. Draw

a line from that across the gold, and aim at the point in the outer ring exactly opposite." The young man did as instructed, and hit the red.

"Kitty Alone, I have it now!" laughed he; threw down another copper, and this time his shot quivered in the bull's-eye.

"Why, Kate! however did you discover the secret?" he asked in amazement.

"I watched. I knew you aimed straight, so I was sure the fault lay in the barrel. There is, you know, a reason for everything."

"Lor', Kitty! I should never have found out that."

"I saw it because you went wrong. I considered *why* you went wrong, and so considering, I saw that the fault must be in the barrel. There is a reason for everything, even for our blunders, and if we seek out the reason where we have blundered, we go right afterwards and blunder no more."

CHAPTER XVI

THE DANCING BEAR

"HAVE some nuts, Rose?" said Jan Pooke. He had got a large paper-bag full of those he had earned.

"I don't want any of your nuts," answered the girl. "I hate hazel cobs, specially when old and dry. I'm going to have some of that sort, and Noah is bringing me some." She pointed to some Brazil nuts.

"They're like slugs turned to stone," said Jan. "There can't be good eating in such as them."

"We shall see. Crack them, Noah."

This was easier ordered than done.

Flood compressed two nuts in his palm, but could not crush them. He tried his teeth, and they failed. He put a nut under his heel, but in the throng was thrust aside and lost his nut.

"I'll do it presently, Rose, as soon as I can find something hard on which to crack 'em."

"Do, Noah. I'm longing to eat them. I wouldn't give a straw for them dried, shrivelled hazel cobs."

"I promise you I'll break 'em — the first occasion."

Then, suddenly, "Rose! Kate! Jan! Come along this way; there is a man here with a dancing bear."

"A bear? Oh, I do want to see a bear!" exclaimed Kate eagerly.

"I don't care for a bear," said Rose.

"But he's dancing—beautiful," urged Noah.

"Oh, if he's dancing, that's another matter," said Rose.

Kate was most desirous to see a bear. She had read of the beast in Æsop's Fables—seen pictures of Bruin as he smelt about the traveller who feigned himself dead whilst his fellow escaped up a tree; also as he tore himself with his claws after having overset the hives and was attacked by the bees. She had formed in her own mind an idea of the beast as very big, and as very stupid.

A considerable throng surrounded the area in which the bear was being exhibited, but Jan and Noah were broad-shouldered, and not scrupulous about forcing a way where they desired to pass, and of thrusting into the background others less broad and muscular. Following close after the two young men, dragged along by them, were Rose and Kate, and they were speedily in the inner ring, in full view of Bruin and his master, an Italian, who held him by a chain. The bear was muzzled, and had a collar to which the chain was attached. A woman, in dirty Neapolitan costume, played a hurdy-gurdy and solicited contributions.

The bear was made to stand on his hind legs, raise one foot, then the other, in clumsy imitation of a dance, and then to take a stick and go through certain evolutions which a lively imagination might figure as gun practice.

"De bear—he beg pretty—von penny, shentlemensh!"

Bruin, instructed by a jerk of the chain and a rap, put his front paws together. Then, tired of his upright attitude, he went down on all-fours.

The brute was not equal to Kate's anticipations, certainly not as massive and shaggy as pictured by Bewick in his Æsop's Fables. About the neck it was rubbed by the collar, and the hair was gone. Its fur over the body was patchy and dirty. The beast seemed to be without energy and to be out of health. Its movements were ungainly, its humour surly.

Kate soon tired of observing the creature, and would have withdrawn from the ring had she been able; but the crowd was compact behind, and she was wedged into her place.

The passive disposition of Bruin was all at once changed by the appearance of a dog that had passed between the legs of the spectators, and which entered the ring and flew at the bear with barks and snaps.

"De dogue! Take de dogue away!" shouted the Italian. "De bear no like dogue."

But no owner of the dog answered and attempted to call it off, and the lookers-on were delighted to have the opportunity of seeing sport.

The dog, apparently a butcher's brute, sprang about the bear, endeavouring to bite, and darting out of his way whenever Bruin struck at it with his fore-paws.

The woman gave up turning the handle of the hurdy-gurdy, and screamed at the dog to desist from irritating the

bear, but it paid no attention to her words. Some fellows in the crowd shouted to the assailant to persevere and take a bite.

The conductor of the bear shortened the chain so as to obtain a portion wherewith to lash the dog, but he was as unsuccessful as his wife. These united attempts to drive it off served only the more to incense the dog and stimulate it against the bear. The man became angry as the young fellows encouraged the dog, and as the bear became unruly, and endeavoured to wrench the end of the chain from his hand, so as to have more scope for defending himself against his adversary.

Rose nudged Noah, and said in a whisper, "Knock her workbox from under her arm."

Flood answered, "'Twould be a shame."

"I won't speak to you again if you don't."

"Heigh!" yelled Noah; "go it, Towser!"

"Is dat your dogue?" shouted the bearward.

"No, not mine," answered Noah. "He looks a towser, that's why I called him so. Go it, Towser!"

When the bear made a dash at his tormentor, the dog sprang back, and the circle that surrounded the area became an ellipse.

On one of these occasions Kate made an effort to withdraw, but Jan caught her by the arm and insisted on retaining her.

"Here comes another!" he said, as a terrier dashed in. "We shall soon have a proper bear-bait."

The Italian woman had stooped and picked up the baton

with which the bear had gone through his drill, and with it she endeavoured to drive away the dogs. The man swore and kicked with his iron-shod boots at them when they came near; but if the dogs showed signs of retreat, they were kicked forward again by the young men in the ring. The owner of Bruin had lost his temper; he saw that the bystanders were amusing themselves at his expense, and that the baited beast was getting beyond his control, being driven wild and desperate by his assailants.

The yelping of the dogs, the cries of the woman and her husband, the cheers and laughter of the crowd, formed a combination of noise frightening to such a girl as Kate.

The bear, frantic at being unable to reach and maul his tormentors, was now tearing at his muzzle. The terrier was on his back, snapping, and the bear rolled over, and with one paw succeeded in forcing the muzzle aside.

At that moment a blow was struck behind Kitty's back at the workbox she carried, and it was propelled into the arena, where it fell, was broken open, and its contents were scattered—thimble, scissors, reels of black and white cotton, pins and pincushion.

"Who did that? By George, it was you, Noah!" shouted Jan, who happened to have turned at the moment and saw the movement of Noah's fist.

Kate asked no questions as to who had done her this wrong. With a cry of dismay, regardless of danger, concerned only for her precious workbox and its contents, she darted forward to pick up what was strewn about. For the moment she forgot the presence of the bear and the dogs,

and, stooping, began to collect what she could, regardless of the cries of the bystanders. Bruin had at the same time wrenched himself free from his guardians, and had fallen upon one of the dogs, which howled, and bit, and writhed, and rolled over at Kate's feet.

Jan Pooke, enraged at the cowardly act of Noah, without looking towards Kate, without a thought that she was in danger, struck Flood full in the face with his clenched fist, and Noah, stung by the blow, and already jealous of Pooke, retaliated.

Immediately the ring that had been formed about the bear and dogs dissolved, and re-formed itself into a figure eight about the several contending parties—some clustering round the bear and dogs, others about the two burly young men, whose fight promised to give greater entertainment than that in the other circle.

Kate was suddenly grasped by a firm hand and drawn away out of danger. She looked up, and saw that she was held by Walter Bramber.

"Oh, my workbox!"

"Never mind your workbox. You were exposed to great risk."

He drew her through the throng.

"Oh, Mr. Bramber, look! look! There is Jan fighting with Noah. It is all because of the workbox. Do go and separate them."

"Not till I have brought you to your father. You cannot be safely trusted in such a crowd,—at least, not with such reckless and quarrelsome fellows as Pooke and the other."

"Yes," said Kate, the tears running down her cheeks, "take me to my father. I wish I had not come here; but indeed—indeed—this is no fault of mine."

"No; of that I am very sure. You are inexperienced, that is all. There come the constables; they will separate the combatants. Be no further concerned for them. I will not now leave you till you are safe out of the fair."

CHAPTER XVII

INSURED

PASCO PEPPERILL had taken the schoolmaster with him through the market-place. He was greeted on all sides by acquaintances and would-be dealers. Pasco's strut became more consequential as he returned the salutations, and he looked out of the corners of his eyes at his companion, to see what impression was made on him by the deference with which he was received.

"I bought wool—two hundred pounds' worth—of that man. Coaker is his name," said Pasco, indicating a moor farmer jogging in on his cob. "I bought last Friday. Do you see Ezra Bornagin? There, sneaking behind his missus. He's had coals of me all the winter, on tick. Hasn't paid a penny, and I'm in doubts whether I shall see the colour of my money. But I'm not one to be crushed by a few bad debts." Presently, "There's the landlady of the 'Crown,' at Newton. She knows where to get good spirits at a moderate figure—that hasn't paid duty—tobacco also. Coombe Cellars is a fine place for a trade in such goods."

"How d' y' do, Pepperill?" said a bluff farmer, coming up

and extending an immense red hand. "Come here to buy or to sell to-day?"

"Both," answered Pasco. "It doesn't do to let money lie idle."

"Ah! if a chap has got money—but when he hasn't, that's another matter. I want to sell."

"What?"

"Hides; will you buy? Had bad luck with my beasts."

"Don't know; I'll see."

"It's terrible bad times," said the big man.

"I suppose it is—for some folks," answered Pepperill.

"I say, I hear you've got the 'Swing' on again down your way."

"Not quite that, I hope. There has been an incendiary fire, but it was the work of one man, not of a gang. I reckon the 'Swing' conspiracy was done with in '30."

"Don't be too sure. One fire has a fatal knack o' kindling others, 'specially if the fellow gets off who did the job."

"He has escaped," said Pasco; "but we know pretty well who did the mischief. It was one Roger Redmore. He'd been turned off for imperence to his master, and drink, and that's how he revenged himself. I wish he'd been caught. A fellow who sets fire a-purpose to rick or barn or house, if I had my way, would be hung without mercy. No transportation; that's too mild. Swing, I say, at a rope's end, and so put an end to all incendiarism."

"I reckon you're about right," said the farmer. "If

there comes another fire, I shall get insured. The fellow is at large."

"Ay, but he won't do any further mischief of this sort. It was a bit o' personal revenge, nothing more; not like them old combinations."

"Well, but who is safe? If I say a word to one of my men that he doesn't like, he may serve me as Redmore has served Pooke."

"That's true," said Pepperill. "More's the reason that Roger should be made an example of. If I see'd him I'd shoot him down as I would a wild beast, or hang him, as I might a lamb-worrying dog, with my own hands—that I would!"

"I know, of those rascals who were sentenced to be hung in '30, more than half got off with transportation; and of them as was transported, most got let off with six or seven years—more's the pity."

"We're too merciful—that's our fault," said Pasco. "Show no pity to the offender,—chief of all, to the incendiary,—and such crimes will soon be put a stop to. We encourage criminals by our over-gentleness."

"Well, I hope this firing o' stacks won't spread; but it's like scarlet fever. What business are you on to-day?"

"I've bought the oaks at Brimpts," said Pepperill.

"So I've heard."

"And I've a mind to dispose of the bark."

"Then here's your man—Hamley the tanner."

The man alluded to came up—a tall, handsome fellow, with a cheery face.

"Mr. Hamley," said Pasco, "you're the chap I want. I shall have tons o' bark to sell shortly."

"Well, Mr. Pepperill, I'm always ready for bark, if the figure suits. Tan is my trade, you know."

"I shall have stuff the like of which you have not had the chance of buying, I'll be bound. I've bought the oaks of Brimpts."

"What, at Dart-meet?"

"Yes; bought the lot. The timber is three hundred years old; hard as iron. And conceive what the bark must be when the timber is so good."

"I doubt if we shall come to terms over that."

"Why not? You won't have another chance. What will you give me a ton?"

"Is the bark running now? It is full early. The sap don't begin to rise so soon as this,—leastways, not in timber trees,—and the moor is always three weeks or a month behind the Hams."

"The bark will be all right, if you will buy. What is the market price?"

"Best bark has been up to seven guineas, but it's not that now. Five guineas is an outside price for thirty-year-old coppice."

"But Brimpts is not coppice—far from it."

"I know, and the value will be according. Sapling, of some forty years, comes second, at four guineas; then last quality is timber-bark, if not too old, say three pound ten."

"Three pound ten?" echoed Pepperill. "A pretty price, indeed. You do not understand. Brimpts oaks must be

three hundred years old, and so worth seven guineas a ton."

"I won't give three guineas for this bark. Take off a pound for every hundred years. If I take it, I don't mind two guineas."

"Two guineas? that's not worth having. The bark is first-rate—must be, it is so tremendous old."

That is just what spoils it. We get the tan-juice from the under rind. We don't want the crust, or outer bark; that is so much waste. Young coppice is the best for our purpose, and worth more for tanning than thrice the value of your old timber. I'll give you two guineas; not a penny more. And let me tell you, you'll have some difficulty in barking the old trees. The sap is a wonderful ticklish thing to run in them; it's like the circulating of blood in old men."

"Two guineas! I won't look at 'em," said Pepperill, and passed on. He was angry and disappointed. He had reckoned on making a good price out of the bark. This meeting with Mr. Hamley would have a bad effect on the schoolmaster. Pepperill turned to him and said, "He's a cunning file. He knows the Brimpts bark is worth seven guineas at least, but he's trying to drive a bargain. He'll come round in time, and be glad to buy at my price."

"Halloo!"

Pepperill was clapped on the back, and, turning, saw his brother-in-law.

"Pasco, old boy," said Jason, "is it true you bought his two years' stock of fleeces off Coaker?"

"Yes, I did."

"More fool you. What did you pay?"

"Thirteenpence."

"Done you are. Have you not heard that wool has dropped to tenpence?"

"Jason! it is not true?"

"It is. There have come in several cargoes of Australian wool, finer than ours; and behind, they say, is simply any amount—mountains of wool. This comes of your not reading the papers. Coaker knew it, and that made him so eager to sell. I hear we shall have a further drop. You are done, old boy, in that speculation. Why did you not consult me? Have you paid Coaker?"

"I gave him fifty pounds, and a bill at two months."

"Try what you can do with the Sloggitts. They may want to buy, but don't reckon on making more than tenpence. Lucky if you get that. I dare swear they will offer no more than ninepence."

Pepperill's face became white, but he quickly rallied, and said to Bramber, "That is Quarm all over; he loves a joke, and he thought to frighten me. I'll go at once to Sloggitt; I know where to find him. He has a mill at Buckfastleigh."

He caught the schoolmaster's arm, and drew him along with him. He had not gone many steps before a stranger addressed him—

"Mr. Pepperill, I believe?"

"Certainly."

"You were pointed out to me. You have done some business with us—the wood at Brimpts. I am the agent

of the bank. I think we oughtn't to have come to so hasty a conclusion. The fact is, we hadn't any idea there was so much forest timber there. But as it is, of course, it can't be helped; only bank rules, you understand, must be observed."

"And what are they?"

"Well—it is all the same, whether we were dealing with the Duke of Bedford or with you. Rules are rules, you know."

"Of course rules are rules. But what are your rules?"

"I'm only an underling; I don't make rules. It is my duty to see they are carried out. You comprehend?"

"To be sure; and what are those rules?"

"Well, you are aware in the bank we always expect payment before delivery. There is the agreement. Mr. Quarm saw our head clerk, and it is all settled. I just came along over the moor to Ashburton Fair, and had a look at Brimpts on my way. They sent me, you know, to see that all is square, and all that sort of thing. I have nothing more to do than just see that you comprehend the rules."

"What am I to do?" asked Pepperill sharply.

"Well, well; it is just this. We don't allow any timber —nothing—to be removed till full payment has been made, and I see you have already begun felling."

"Yes; I suppose my brother-in-law has begun to cut."

"You know, that's all right and proper; but rules are rules, and I'm not my own master. I don't make regulations; I am held to seeing them carried out. There's a matter of a couple of hundred pounds you'll have to pay

into the bank before a stick is disposed of, or a ton of bark removed."

"And when do you demand the money? Will not a bill do?"

"Rules, you see, are rules! they ain't india-rubber, that you can pull about to accommodate as is desired. I dare-say you want to get the timber removed as quickly as you can, but, hang it! rules are rules, and you can't till the money is paid in cash. Personally I love bills, but the bank don't, that's a fact. I suppose you, or Mr. Quarm, will be over next week at the bank, and pay up. Then we've nothing to say but clear away the timber and the bark as you can."

When Pepperill had shaken off the agent of the bank, he turned to Bramber, and said, "Did you catch his admission? He said that the bank had made a mistake in letting us have Brimpts wood so cheap. Actually it sold without ever having seen. Of course I shall pay up; and if I don't pocket a thousand pounds out of the transaction, call me a fool."

A moment later he was touched on the arm, and saw the landlady of the Crown, Mrs. Fry. She made him a sign, and whispered, "Take care; the revenue officers have smelt something. Have you a stock by you?"

Pepperill nodded.

"That's bad. Get rid of it as quick as you can, lest they pay you a visit. I've had a hint."

"Thanks," said Pasco, looking uncomfortable.

His visit to Messrs. Sloggitt was more discouraging than he had been led to expect. Mr. James Sloggitt, who was

in Ashburton, told him bluntly that the firm was indisposed to buy wool at any price. The importations from Australia had disturbed the market, and there was no knowing to what extent wool might fall. They would buy nothing till they had received advice as to how much more foreign wool was coming in.

"That won't touch me," said Pasco. "Down it goes in a panic, and up it will swing in a month or two, and then I shall sell. Come with me to the Red Lion, and have a glass of ale."

"Thank you," said Bramber; "if you will excuse me, I should wish to go into the fair."

"There is time enough," answered Pepperill; "I shall not let you go yet. What! Jason—here again?"

Quarm limped up, and planted himself in front of him.

"I have hardly had a word with you yet, Pasco. How is my sister—and how is Kitty?"

"Both pretty middling. Kate is here—in the fair. I left her with Jan Pooke and his party. Something may come of this, Zerah thinks. Jan has been mightily attentive since they were together in the boat."

"Pasco," said Jason, "that fellow, Roger Redmore, is abroad still."

"Yes; he has not been caught."

"If I was you, I would insure."

"Pshaw! I'm not afraid of fire."

"There is no telling. You keep such a stock of all kinds of goods in your place—coals, spirits, wool, hides—and now

you are likely to have bark in. Take my advice and insure, in case of accident."

"It is throwing good money away."

"Not a bit. If Pooke had insured, he would not now be the loser to the tune of fifty pounds."

"Well; I don't mind; but if I insure, it shall be for a round sum."

"Two or three hundred?"

"Bah! A thousand."

"A thousand?"

"Why not? My stores are worth it."

"Are they? Stores, and house as well?"

"No, stores alone. I'll consider about the house."

"A thousand pounds! You don't mean it, Pasco?"

"Ay. I'll insure for one thousand two hundred. I shall have all Coaker's wool in, and the Brimpts tan which Hamley won't buy; and I shall be having coals in during summer when price is down, to sell in winter when prices are up. Twelve hundred, Jason; not a penny under."

"Come on, then, to the office, and have your policy drawn."

"We do business in a large way," said Pepperill, turning to Bramber. "Twelve hundred would not cover my loss, were that scoundrel Redmore to set fire to my stores. Now I will let you go; may you enjoy yourself. Come, Jason—twelve hundred!"

CHAPTER XVIII

BRAZIL NUTS

THE constables, always on the alert for some breach of the law during the fair, had come down on the combatants, arrested them, and conveyed them to the court-house.

On fair-days a magistrate was ever at hand to dispose of such cases as might arise, disputes over engagements, quarrels, petty thefts, etc.

Mr. Caunter, the justice who lived in the town, and who had undertaken not to absent himself that day, was summoned. Another joined him.

The two young men presented a somewhat battered and deplorable condition. Noah, bruised in the face, had his eye darkened and swelling; but Jan showed the most damaged appearance, as his head had been cut, and the blood had flowed over his forehead and stained his cheek. Something had been done to wash his face and to staunch the flow, but this had been only partially successful.

The court-house was crowded. Friends and acquaintances had deserted the bear, that they might see the end of

the brawl between the lusty young men, and to exhibit their sympathy and give evidence in their favour if required.

After the constables had recorded their evidence, the magistrate called on John Pooke to say what he had to state in answer to the charge. It was a case of affray, and of common assault if one of the parties chose to complain.

"You seem to be the one most damaged," said the justice. "What is your name?"

"John Pooke."

"Where from?"

"Coombe-in-Teignhead, sir."

"I think I have heard your name. Your father is a most respectable yeoman, I believe."

"Yes, sir, and woundy fat."

"Never mind about his obesity. With so respectable a parent, in such a position, it is very discreditable that you should be brought up before me as taking a principal part in a vulgar brawl."

"Brawl, sir? where?"

"Here in Ashburton, in the market-place, according to the account of the constables, you were principal in an affray, and an affray—according to Lord Coke—is a public offence to the terror of the king's subjects, so called because it affrighteth and maketh men afraid."

"I, sir? Whom did I affright and make afraid?"

"The public, before whom you were fighting."

"Lor, bless you, sir! they loved it. It was better sport than a little dog snapping at a mangy bear."

"Never mind whether they liked it or not; it was an

affray and an assault. Now tell me your version of the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"The brawl. Did you not hear what the constables said?"

"Oh, that little tittery matter! We was looking at a bear and a dog."

"Well—proceed."

"The dog didn't understand how to get hold of the bear; he thought he was wus' than he was, and the bear could do nothing till he had his muzzle off. Then up came a little terrier. My word! he was a daring little dowse of a dog."

"I want to hear nothing about the dogs and the bear, but about yourselves. What was the occasion of your quarrel with your adversary?"

"Adversary?"

"Yes; the other—Noah Flood, I believe he is called. You see he has a swollen eye, and his face is puffed and bruised. I presume you admit you hit this man Flood?"

"What!—Noah?"

"Yes, Noah."

"Was that him you called my adversary?"

"Yes; you were fighting him, so the constable says."

"Bless y'! Noah is a right-down good fellow, and a chum o' mine. He's no adversary."

"Anyhow, you banged him about, assaulted him, and did him grievous bodily harm."

"Who—I?"

"Yes, you."

"Lawk, sir! Noah and I was at school together with Mr. Puddicombe. That was before his little misfortune, sir, when he lost the school because of cock-fighting. Father never approved of his being turned out, nor did I—nor Noah neither. We got on famous wi Puddicombe; didn't us, Noah?"

"I want to hear nothing about your school reminiscences," said the magistrate sharply. "Moreover, you will please to confine your observations to the Bench, and not address questions to your fellow under arrest."

"Thank you, sir. What is that?" This last to the constable. "I beg your pardon, the constable tells me I ought to say 'your worship,' and so I does. Noah and I was in the same class; we left the school together, and the very last thing we learned was, 'Vital spark of heavenly flame'; wasn't it, Noah?"

Noah assented.

"I do not care what the course of instruction was in the school," protested Mr. Caunter. "To the point, if you please, and remember, address yourself to the Bench. There was some sort of affray between you and Flood. The constables separated you. What led to this?"

"I believe there was some tittery bit of a thing. I titched Noah, and Noah titched me, and my hat falled off. You see, your worship, I'd pomatumed my hair this morning, and so my hat didn't sit easy. My head was all slithery like, and a little titch, and away went my hat."

"Here is the hat, your worship," said a constable, pro-

ducing and placing on the table a battered and trampled piece of headgear.

"Is that your hat, John Pooke?"

"I reckon it may ha' been. But her's got terrible knocked about. It wor a mussy that I hadn't on my new hat I got at Exeter—that would ha' been a pity. I bought she for sister's Sue's wedding. Sister Sue be a-going to be married after Easter, your worship."

"I don't want to hear about sister Sue. So Noah Flood knocked your hat off, and that occasioned"—

"I beg your pardon, sir, I never said that. I said my head was that slithery wi' pomatum the hat falled off, and then folks trod on it."

"Come, this is trifling with the Bench, and with the majesty of the law. The people may have trampled on your hat, but not on your head, which is cut about and battered almost as much as the hat."

"No, sir, I don't fancy nobody trod on my head."

"How comes it about that you are so cut and bruised? I see you have had your wounds plastered."

"Yes, your worship. The surgeon, he sewed up the wust place."

"And your dear good friend and chum, and school companion, and comrade in learning 'Vital spark of heavenly flame,' did that, I presume?"

"No, sir, it was the surgeon did it."

"What, cut your head open?"

"No, sir; sewed it up."

'Then who cut your head open?"

"Nobody, sir."

"Someone must have done it. This evasion only makes the case worse."

"Nobody did it at all. It was the Brazil nuts."

"Brazil nuts?" exclaimed the magistrate in astonishment. "I do not understand you."

"Well, your worship, they're terrible hard, and have got three corners. Noah! hand over some of them nuts to his honour. Just you try your teeth on 'em, Mr. Caunter. You can't do it. It was the Brazil nuts as cut my head. Not that it matters much. My head be nicely sewed up again, and right as ever it was."

"Explain the circumstances to the Bench, and no meandering, if you please."

"Well, that's easy done, your worship. Noah, he'd bought thickey nuts at a stall. What did you give for 'em, Noah?"

"Tu'pence," said Flood solemnly.

"Hish! hish!" from the nearest constable.

"Twopence he paid, your worship, and then he wanted to crack 'em and couldn't do it. He couldn't wi' his teeth, nor in his fist. If your worship will be pleased to try on the desk, you'll find how hard the nuts be."

"Go on, and to the point."

"You see, Rose, she's got a wonderful fancy for nuts"—

"Who may Rose be?"

"Her's the beautifullest maid in Coombe-in-Teignhead—red cheeks as she ought to have, being called Rose; and as for twinkling eyes"—

"Never mind a description; what is the other name?"

"Rose Ash. She is here, sir, looking on and blushing."

"We'll call her presently. Proceed with your story."

"Rose, she wanted Noah to crack the nuts, and he hadn't a hammer, nor a stone, so"—

"He broke them on your head?"

"No, sir, he broke my head with the nuts."

"Oh, that is the rights of the story, is it? You objected, and a fight ensued?"

"He'd undertaken to crack the nuts for Rose, sir." Then, turning to Flood, "That's about it, ain't it, Noah? Shake hands; we're old friends."

"I agrees with everything as my friend Jan Pooke said. He puts it beautiful," said Flood.

"Step aside, John Pooke," said the magistrate; "we will now hear what the other fellow has to say."

Nothing, however, was to be extracted from Flood but that he agreed with Jan, and Jan could speak better than he. He referred himself to Jan. Jan knew all about it, and he himself was so bewildered that he could not remember much, but as Jan spoke, all came out clear. As to the Brazil nuts, he had them in his hand, and it was true he "had knocked Jan on the head wi' 'em. If the gentleman would overlook it this time, he hoped no offence; but he'd buy no more Brazil nuts—never as long as he lived."

"Call Rose Ash!" said the justice. "Perhaps she can throw some light on this matter."

Rose was in court, and was soon in the witness-box,

looking very pretty, and very conscious that the eyes of every one in the place were on her. She kissed the New Testament with a glance round of her twinkling eyes that said as plain as words, "Would not every young fellow in this room like to be in the place of the book?"

"It was all the fault of Kitty Alone," said Rose. "We were in peace and comfort till she came meddling and setting one against another; just like her—the minx!"

"And who, if you please, is Kitty Alone?"

"Kitty Quarm. There never would have been any unpleasantness unless she had poked her nose in. Me and Jan Pooke drove to the fair, and then up comes Kitty and will interfere and be disagreeable."

"Constable, send for Catherine Quarm," ordered the magistrate. "I presume she is not far off. Go on, Miss Ash, and tell us precisely the cause of the quarrel."

"That is more than I can undertake to do. All I know is that Kitty was at the bottom of it."

"How do you know that?"

"Every one who knows Kitty knows that she is a mischief-maker. Nasty, meddlesome toad!"

"Rose, this is spite, and nothing more," exclaimed Jan.

"Silence!" ordered the magistrate. "The witness is not to be interfered with."

"Please, your worship, I won't have her slandering an innocent girl just because I gave her a workbox as a fairing."

The justice endeavoured, but in vain, to get a connected story out of Rose. That Kitty was at the bottom of the

fight, guilty of setting the young men boxing and belabouring each other: that was the burden of her evidence.

"A word with John Pooke," said the justice, "whilst we are waiting for the other witness."

Jan was put into the dock again.

"Is it your intention to summons Flood for assault?"

"What—Noah?"

"Yes, on account of your head being cut open."

"My head is sewn up."

"But you have suffered loss of blood."

"The nuts did that, not Noah."

"Then you forgive him?"

"Whom?"

"Noah Flood."

"There is nothing to forgive. The nuts were terrible hard. He'll never buy any more."

Kate Quarm was now brought into court, and placed in the witness-box. She was bidden to give a succinct account of the quarrel.

"I was standing looking at the bear," she said, "and someone knocked my workbox from under my arm. I do not know who did it, there was such a crowd, and all were in motion because the bear had got free of his chain and muzzle. Then I ran to pick up what was fallen, and when next I looked about me, Jan Pooke and Noah Flood were fighting."

"What made them fight?"

"I do not know, sir. Perhaps Jan thought Noah had knocked my workbox from under my arm. But I cannot

tell. I had gone after my scattered things, and then I was drawn away to be taken to my father."

"You did not hear Pooke say anything to Flood, or *vice versâ*, about cracking nuts?"

"Not then, sir; a little before, Rose had asked to have the Brazil nuts cracked, and Noah had promised to crack them when the opportunity came."

"I told you so, your worship," threw in Pooke.

"Well," said the magistrate, "this girl Kate Quarm is the only one among you who seems to have her wits about her, and can tell a simple tale in an intelligent way. As for you, John Pooke, and you, Noah Flood, I shall bind you over to keep the peace, and dismiss you with a caution."

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